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THE GREAT FAMINE AND ITS CAUSES

DINNER-TIME IN THE URULI FAMINE CAMP. *Frontispiece.*

THE GREAT FAMINE

AND

ITS CAUSES

BY

VAUGHAN NASH

98887

WITH EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR
AND A MAP OF INDIA SHOWING
THE FAMINE AREA

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PREFACE

THE letters published in this volume appeared originally in the *Manchester Guardian*. I have made a few additions and alterations, but none of any moment. No account of so vast a catastrophe, written by any one observer, can pretend to be more than a fragmentary record of impressions; and though I suppose I saw more of the superficial extent of the famine during the eleven weeks which I spent in India than any other person, the great panorama of suffering that unrolled itself day by day was, in relation to the whole, the merest riband. May I add that the most generous help was given to me by all classes to whom I appealed, and that the advice and assistance of the British and Native members of the Civil Service—often given, I fear, at great personal inconvenience—

lightened my task enormously. If my conclusions as to the economic situation are not accepted by all whom it was my privilege to meet, I must console myself by expressing my deep obligations for the information and material which enabled me to arrive at any conclusions at all. The photographs in the present volume scarcely touch the ghastlier aspects of the famine.

V. N.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	IN THE GATEWAY OF INDIA	1
II.	IN THE DECCAN	11
III.	THE PENAL MINIMUM	26
IV.	LIFE ON THE RELIEF WORKS	36
V.	A ROAD OF SORROW	46
VI.	CHOLERA IN KHANDESH	53
VII.	SOME VILLAGE BUDGETS	62
VIII.	IN THE GARDEN OF INDIA	68
IX.	THE PANCH MAHALS	77
X.	THINGS THAT MAKE FOR FAMINE	87
XI.	THE FAMINE IN THE DESERT	97
XII.	MARWAR AND JAIPUR	108
XIII.	THE PUNJAUB	122
XIV.	THE COLLECTION OF LAND REVENUE	134
XV.	IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES	144
XVI.	THE PENAL WAGE AGAIN	166

PAGE

XVII. GUJERAT IN MAY 175

XVIII. FAMINE ORGANISATION IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES 186

XIX. HOW INDIA IS FED . 198

XX. SOME PREVENTIVE MEASURES . . 206

XXI. DEBT AND EXPROPRIATION . . . 217

XXII. THE WORKING OF THE LAND REVENUE SYSTEM 234

APPENDIX

OFFICIAL REPORTS ON THE FAMINE . . . 251

INDIAN TERMS AND THEIR EQUIVALENTS . . . 262

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

TO FACE PAGE

DINNER-TIME IN THE URULI FAMINE CAMP *Frontispiece*

STONE-BREAKING AT URULI 17

THE VILLAGERS OF VALAK 23

IN THE POORHOUSE AT NANDURBAR . . . 56

MALERIA TANK NEAR BROACH: ON STARVATION WAGES 75

IN THE FAMINE CAMP AT GODHRA 83

SIR PERTAB 106

TAHVANDI RANA: ON VILLAGE RELIEF . . . 131

MAP . . . . . *At End*

I

IN THE GATEWAY OF INDIA

THERE is nothing in the outward appearance of Bombay to suggest that all is not well with the city or with India. When I came ashore I found the people busy keeping holiday. The natives were celebrating the festival of the Holi, and the Europeans were away at the races. On every hand there was movement, animation, and dazzling colour. People went about in the Fort, as the European quarter is called, as unconcernedly as if it had been Pall Mall. In the Bazaar the traders squatted on their haunches, chewing their betel and rolling their eyes in the seventh heaven of indolence. The procession of bullock waggons creaked along as usual. Work at the docks was active, and along Frere Road the piled-up stacks of grain showed that there was still corn in

India. The policeman, in his blue tunic and orange cap, lolled at ease, unperturbed by any sense of the unusual. Natural enough, perhaps, this general unconcern, though a trifle disconcerting to the person whose notions of plague are formed on Defoe, and who fancies that famine on the scale and intensity of this present famine must be an absorbing horror for every soul within touch of it. Natural because Bombay has been having its course of plague for three or four years, because human nature is quick to accustom itself to new conditions, however horrible, so soon as the imagination has ceased to feed upon them. Besides, in the East, as we have all been told till we are tired of it, the people are fatalistic. Whether they put down the scourgings which have fallen upon their backs to their gods or their Government I do not know. There are those who hold that the clash of Western civilisation with that of the East has led to some mixing of deities, and that the Government is held responsible for evils to-day which were laid at the doors of the gods in less complicated times. Let us hope this is not so.

A closer inspection of the city, however,

gives you a sense of the shadows that are cast by the Indian sun. The festival of the Holi began in a week when people had been dying at the rate of 400 a day from plague, small-pox, measles, and the current maladies of the East. This rate of mortality is expected to mark the high-water line of the present year, for the hot weather is now beginning, and until the rains are come and gone the plague will be almost forgotten. The outlook is, however, a very serious one. Colonel Weir, the medical officer, has given me the mortality statistics for the first three months of the years 1897–1900, and the figures show that this year has been far worse than any other year of the plague, the record for eleven weeks showing 26,539 deaths from all causes during the March quarter, as compared with 20,110, 24,348, 23,310 for the three previous years. By the time the two last weeks in March are added in, the death-roll will be more than 10,000 in excess of 1897. And this with a sanitary staff of 6000 officials of one sort or another! How many deaths are actually due to plague the authorities no longer pretend to say, though of late they have been registering some 700 a week. Concessions

have had to be made to the native prejudice against the plague regulations, and the net effect of it all would seem to be that plague patients who do not belong to the poorest class are permitted to suffer and die in peace from a disease of some other name. Phthisis, so I am told, is a popular complaint at the moment. So long as this is the position in Bombay it is obvious that every part of India is threatened with a plague invasion, and elaborate preventive measures have to be taken, the effect of which upon the trade of the country and the temper of the people can hardly be overestimated. It is not only the plague-smitten areas but the threatened districts which are suffering acutely from the pestilence, and the cost of keeping up an army of medical inspectors and subordinate officials is a heavy burden on the backs of the people. Truly the glare from the burning ghat on the Queen's Road is a sorry beacon light to be set in the gateway of India. Day and night the bodies are being taken to the ghat and built in with huge billets of dry wood, which burn, when the torch is put to them, with extraordinary fierceness. One sees long rows of these braziers

blazing furiously; the sparks fly from the crackling wood high into the air, and clouds of pungent smoke pour out into the road. People with a taste for dramatic contrasts may picture, if they please, the procession of carriages trooping out to the party at Government House last Monday night and passing within a few feet of the burning bodies and right through the smoke of this unspeakable pest-heap of corpses.

The famine has added its quota to the troubles of Bombay. Many of the cotton mills are standing idle because of the failure of the crop; and the high price of grain—for foodstuffs of all sorts are twice as dear as when the famine began—presses hardly on the people. Starving wanderers, too, have come by thousands from the far north of the presidency, from parts of Gujerat and from Kathiawar, bringing with them their little remnants of worldly goods, consisting of a bundle or two of clothes for the family and a few pots. The presence of groups of these refugees wandering about the streets by day, and camping out on the open spaces or sleeping by the doorways and on the pavements, is another of the strange incidents to which

Bombay has accustomed itself. When, three months ago, the wanderers first began to appear, the police collected them and sent them back in boatloads to their own parts. But the groups of stolid men and tired women and clusters of children appeared again—nobody knows how they managed the journey of 250 miles,—and the authorities at last grew tired of the work and let the people stay. The police estimate that 10,000 of these poor creatures are quartered in Bombay at the present moment. I cannot say that they show traces of famine. The wealthier people of the Hindoo and Mussulman communities have been liberal in doling out handfuls of grain, and any morning you can see the breakfast collected the day before being prepared in the open ground which is at once bed, table, and living room. The father is drawing water with an old tin can out of a well with a green shiny surface. The mother is the centre of a group superintending the cooking pan, which is balanced on a couple of stones, under which a lot of smoke and a very little fire are being produced; and when all is ready the mixture of rice and grain will be divided amongst the company. Beyond the daily visits

to the houses of the rich and to the grain stores, where certain charitable merchants lend a helping hand, there is little done in the way of begging. I walked this morning through a plot of land where some hundreds of people were preparing for breakfast, and not one of them asked for money. They do not belong to the begging class, and most of them are cultivators who have left their own farms behind them in the north. Their cattle are dead, their fields are hard as iron, and to have stayed longer would have meant death.

The growing stress of the famine is every week forcing the Government to extend its system of relief. Already there are nearly five million people camped out on famine works or getting relief in poorhouses or in their own villages; and this is only the fringe of the sufferers. Accustomed as India is to seasons of scarcity, she has never had to face a crisis like the present one. Nearly half of India is hit. From Hissar, in the Punjaub, where 160,000 are on relief, down to the south of the Bombay Deccan, the famine has the land in its grip. In most of the intervening territory, both British and native, the former

and the latter rains held off last year, so that the autumn and spring crops have utterly failed. Bombay Presidency, if you except the coast strip, is one great famine district, and in some parts of it one out of three of the population has come upon the Government. In parts of Gujerat the people are dying by scores every week. In Khandesh the suffering is appalling, and from what I hear the extent of the famine in some of the Native States is only suspected by the Government. In a single week an avalanche of 10,000 starving people was loosed in Hyderabad and came down on the relief works in this Presidency. One doctor in the northern district reports having found seven people dead in one poorhouse and twenty in another; and in some of the districts where the people have clung to their homes to the last it is a common thing to find dead bodies along the road to the nearest relief camp. Another piteous feature of the famine is the loss of cattle. Millions of beasts have died already, and when the ryot loses his bullock he is like the fisherman who has lost his boat. The Government has established a few cattle camps in the hope of saving the best of the

animals, and is offering forage at low prices. Some of the cattle will be saved by this means, but for the mass of ryots in the worst districts the want of water and of money to buy fodder spells death for the beasts. If they cannot be sold for a rupee or two they will be left to die by starvation, for the sacred beast must not be killed. Amongst the Mussulmans, however, the case is different, and I have heard of a town in Gujerat where a regular organised slaughtering is being carried on, and of course the hides fetch something. It is just as if the English or Irish farmers were to kill their plough horses for the sake of the hides.

Next week I shall be in the midst of the famine districts in the south of the Presidency, a witness of the hand-to-hand fight which the Government is waging with the worst famine that India has ever seen. By a strange irony, this same Government is collecting the revenue from the starving ryot. It seems incredible, but I am only writing the truth when I say that word has gone forth that the revenue must at all costs be gathered in, and at this very moment the entire collecting machinery is at work on the business. Instead of picking the

bones of the people at a time like this, would it not be better for the Government of India to tide things over with a loan, better for the State to go into debt than to increase the people's indebtedness—that ever-growing burden which the ryot carries from the cradle to the grave?

BOMBAY, 21 *March*.

II

IN THE DECCAN

THE brown lands of the Deccan, none too rich at the best of times, are fast being turned into tracts of dismal sun-cracked desert—charred earth whose friable edges are caught by the wind and sent flying in clouds of pungent dust. No water in the wells, no water in the rivers—this is the report that comes in from the districts, and you can easily test it for yourself. The Khadkalla river, in the Poona district, which I have struck on twice this week, has a few large pools left standing in its bed, watched by the beasts and ladled by the people; the rest is dusty boulders. I found donkeys and cattle being driven along the sandy bed of the Sina river as I crossed the bridge this morning, and recrossing it later in the day I saw the women spreading their clothes to dry in the river

bottom. Town and cantonment are getting their water by bullock transport. Even the engines on the line, like the cattle, are reduced to picking up water where they can. We were stopped yesterday for supplies at a nullah near Visapur, which the railway people have been tapping. The farmers in the villages are doing their best to drive wells down to the water, and Government has been lavish in making advances to help them, but the successive droughts seem to have left the earth bone dry to a depth never known before, and little comes of the ryots' efforts. The central horror of this famine lies in the fact that the misery and torment of a water famine have to be endured together with a famine of food for people and fodder for beasts.

In ordinary famines, or even in normal times when the work on his farm grows slack, the ryot will leave his home and go off to Bombay in search of work, or he will take to bullock-driving, or try to pick up a labourer's job on the irrigated lands in the north. But this year plague and famine have shut the door in his face, and no work is to be had. The Mahratta ryot is a hardy fellow; but what can he do when

the cattle have gone to the butcher, when the last grains of the famine crop have been eaten, when the money-lender will not lend another pie, and the bucket comes empty up the well? In the first place, he will send his wife and children to the relief works, and try if he can struggle on alone; and probably after a time he will give that up as a hopeless job and go to join his family at the famine camp. This, I am told, is the first famine that has found the farmers in any numbers on the relief works. At some of the camps in the Poona district there are 40 per cent. of Mahrattas, most of them farmers or members of farmers' families, working and sleeping in the same camp with beggars and with mahars, who sweep the villages and eat the flesh of famine-stricken bullocks. A fair test this of the extremity of the cultivator.

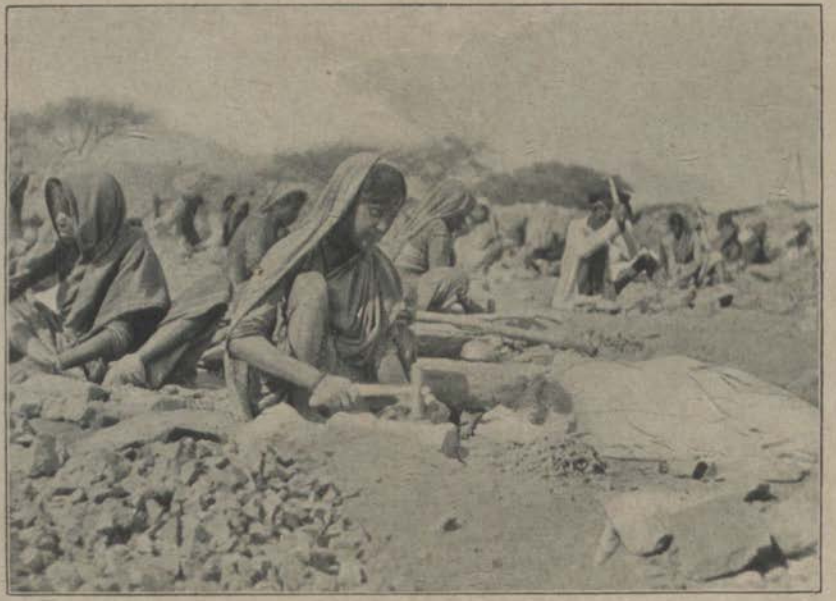
The exodus from the villages has been going on ever since last year, and in spite of the action of Government in moving the works to greater distances, or where this is impracticable in drafting the villagers to camps that are far away from their homes, and notwithstanding the more stringent deterrent features of relief

routine, it still goes on. During the last few days I have met scores of family parties on tramp to the works, the mother carrying the latest-born in a basket on her head and the last but one in her arms or on her back, and the father and elder children dividing the burden of family goods, which generally consist of a few pots, a bundle in a blanket, and perhaps the handmill for grinding. A woman came marching the other day into a camp in Khandesh with two babies in the basket on her head, one on each arm, and another couple clutching at her sari. It is sad to see these groups of refugees pacing the burning dust with lips and throats too parched for speech, their garments often in shreds and their eyes hollow with hunger. The Indian in these parts never seems to be sorry for himself or to look for sympathy from others. He just goes on. The bulk of the wayfarers whom I met in the Poona district did not show signs of far-advanced starvation. Now and again I noticed emaciated beings with legs like sticks, who stalked along, bundle on head, with a painful hitching motion of the hips, but they were the exception. The majority were distressed,

exhausted, and reduced, but not beyond the point at which a few weeks' feeding, care, and rest should set them up again. My impression is that the bulk of the people have not waited for the last extremity of want, but have set off for camp precisely when there was no more food to be had at home.

But let me go back to my visits to the relief works. I made a beginning in the Poona collectorate, where the stress of famine is relatively slight, only 65,000 out of a million of people having so far come upon the works. In this district most of the people are being put to stone-breaking, and according to the figures supplied to me, not more than seven or eight thousand are employed on other tasks. My first sight of a famine camp was at Uruli, a village on the Sholapur road, sixteen miles from Poona. Here I found some hundreds of people grouped in gangs of thirty, squatting on the ground, each man, woman, and child beside a heap of broken and unbroken stones. They seemed to me to make poor hands at the work, the old women and the young children especially, though the children pounded away with abundant misdirected energy. The youngsters

under eight seemed to me the most thriving set in the camp. I found them having their breakfast of half a cake of millet—not at all bad food,—which they were crumbling into small fragments and mixing with oil and highly seasoned condiments—pepper, chili, saffron, and salt, with a groundwork of carrot—calculated to make the English infant dance with pain. Each child had a pannikin of some sort; everything was arranged with order, and, except for the frequent bad eyes, the occasional sores, and the obvious languor with which some of the children ate their breakfast, there was nothing painful in the sight of the large breakfast party. After breakfast the children trotted off to look for shade under the few trees that were dotted about. I believe they are to have some sort of shelter before long, a piece of extravagance which seems permissible with the thermometer at 150 degrees in the sun at midday, and matting and bamboos going cheap. The babies of the camp who stay with their mothers at the stone heap are not so fortunate, and to English eyes there was something painful in seeing these infants tucked up somehow in the mother's ragged sari or cradled amongst



STONE-BREAKING AT URULI.

the stones, while the sun beat upon their heads and the chips came flying from the women's hammers. One child with half its head blue with a frightful sore was keeping up a dolorous howling, the mother folding one arm about it for comfort while she hammered with the other. A little way off from the clink of this Nibelung chorus, three cashiers were squatted on a carpet tossing the wages for the week on to another carpet placed in front of a group of women whose names were being called from the register.

The wages throughout the relief works are paid in money, and they are based on a hypothetical ration of so much grain, salt, vegetables, condiments, and oil, a maximum and a minimum ration being fixed, and the whole adjusted to the price of grain in the bazaar. I shall have more to say later on about the system of work and payment, but it will be seen that the scale works automatically in two important respects. It safeguards the worker against a rise in prices—the price of grain is, roughly, twice as high now as before the famine, but if it were four times as high the food equivalent would still be paid—and it imposes, in theory at least,

a certain check upon any tendency to shirk the allotted task. The system is not one of piece-work, but of taskwork with a low minimum and a maximum—the outturn of the gang giving the measure of the individual's wages.

My visit to Uruli happened to fall on a black day, for, a week before, a circular had been issued decreeing that all gangs performing less than half the maximum task—an imaginary standard, by the way, which no single gang had accomplished during the week in question—should be paid 25 per cent. below the minimum. So that instead of ten and a half annas, the former weekly minimum, the men and women in the defaulting gangs were getting seven and a half and the working children four and a half annas. This is why the group of women at the pay carpet looked so dejected, why the people kept throwing up their arms or bending low in an attitude of petition as I picked my way between the circles of stone-breakers. "They think you have come to tell them that the wages will not be reduced," a native official explained. Whether the people can subsist on this penal allowance without ripening for cholera and other famine diseases

is a grave question. The new scale, which has, I believe, been very generally adopted in the Presidency, is the result of the circular issued by Mr. Holderness on behalf of the Government of India. It has been introduced in the full belief that there exists throughout the famine districts a system of organised shirking, against which the prescribed minimum was of no avail, and which bids fair to destroy the deterrent element of the relief machinery. The cry, "Ye are idle, ye are idle," comes from almost every English official on famine duty. To which the people reply, "Give us more food, and we will do more work; this is our third year of famine within four years." It is an ominous fact that whilst the minimum is being cut down by a quarter—a minimum which assumes that only fifteen ounces of solid food a day will go into the stomachs of people who must work nine hours between the rising and the setting of an Indian sun—cholera is on the march in Khandesh, and God help India if cholera attacks the famine camps!

I must cut short what I have to say about the other camps in the Poona district. But

concerning the works at Khadkalla, where some four thousand stone-breakers are employed, a word or two may be said which will throw light on the charges of pauperisation with which the Government of India are backing their enforcement of the penal minimum. Granting, for the sake of argument, that a large percentage of the people are skulking, what evidence have the Government for the assumption that the villagers are leaving their homes for the works without compunction, and that the old feelings of pride and independence have yielded to the attractions of free quarters and light work? Attractions! Take the life in camp. At three o'clock in the morning the women get up and begin to grind the grain for the midday meal. The refugees have spent the night in the open air—in Poona district no huts are provided for the rank and file,—and the morning breeze, as I can testify, blows cold from the Ghauts, cruelly cold for people whose only covering is a threadbare kambli—a word which by courtesy appears to be translated blanket. Then, perhaps, fuel has to be gathered, for it costs an anna a week to buy, or nearly a seventh of the week's wages; and when the

bundle of sticks has been collected it is liable to be seized by the officers of the Forest Department. The officials at Khadkalla told me that such seizures had happened several times. When work begins, the attractions of stone-breaking, however leisurely performed, are not obvious. The people are unused to the work, and the stones are hard and difficult to crack. I took the hammer from a little girl who was vainly trying to break a small lump of stone, but after thirty blows, directed, as I thought, with judgment, I gave it up and handed it to the ganger. It took the ganger another dozen strokes to split the stone into two or three bits, and these bits had again to be severally assailed before they would pass through the two-inch ring. But if I am wrong and the life really does attract the people, why is it they have not come before? The famine has been going on and camps have been open in the collectorate for several months. Moreover, the famine code lays it down that the village patels or headmen "shall do their utmost to induce distressed villagers to go to relief works," and judging by appearances some of the new arrivals might well have

yielded to the patel's urgency long since. If the people are so demoralised as is alleged, their delay in coming to camp is unaccountable.

Valak and Khamshet villages are close at hand, and the day before my visit to the works I went to inspect them, accompanied by an ex-official who knows the district well. A fair number of the villagers had gone on the works, but most of them I found were still resisting the temptation, preferring to struggle along on wild fruits and whatever they could pick up. Khamshet had come to the end of its beans, and was fairly cleaned out, though not before Government had secured 182 rupees as a first instalment of the land tax—a demand which made a biggish hole in the beans. Valak had paid 125 rupees, and notices for the second instalment had been served on both villages. The people whom I met at this Sunday morning durbar on the spurs of the Ghauts were not at all of the whining sort. They answered questions in a straightforward way, through their headman and accountant, and made few complaints. They allowed me to go into their houses—sheds with mud walls, thatched roofs, and grass partitions—and see all that was to be

THE VILLAGERS OF VALAK

seen—a heap of cow dung for fuel and manure, two or three brass pots, a stone for rolling chili, a handmill, a quilt of rags for sleeping on, and the spare clothes of the family strung on a line. There may have been food in hiding, but I saw no traces of it in Khamshet, though in Valak a woman was working her mill, and I believe things were slightly better there. I asked about the silver ornaments, but was told that they were all pledged or sold last famine. What about the money-lender? Two-thirds of the lands of each village were mortgaged, and no more could be borrowed. In Valak the money-lender—a beak-nosed, shifty-looking, pink-turbaned gentleman introduced to me by the interpreter as the village creditor—was present on a visit. He had come to look for money, not to lend it, and his grievance, which he let me know before the village, was that he could not recover any part of the two hundred rupees he had lent to the villagers for grain last year. But though the people did not parade their wrongs, they let me know two things before I left the villages. The men wanted advances to enable them to prepare their fields in time for the rains, and the women, who

kept in the background till we were moving off, would not let us go till the Englishman had seen the blind folk and the ancient tottering villagers and been asked to consider whether perhaps a handful of the grain which the Government allow for village relief might not be spared for them. Of their own hardships on the works and in the village they said nothing. I shall not soon forget this meeting with the villagers who pay us to govern India; the haggard, hunted faces of the women, turned to hideousness by a life of misery; the tottering skeletons of old men; the blind mother with the blind child, and the other child that the two kept fingering; the bright eyes and hard-set faces of the men, and the naked children with distended stomachs and flies at the corners of their eyes; and the bunch of red idol surveying us all through the open door of the temple, under a roof of corrugated iron from Wolverhampton. I asked the headman to tell his people that I had come from England to see them, and that the people of England were sorry for their sufferings. On reflection I admit it seems unreasonable that Khamshet and Valak should not shut their doors and

hasten to the works in a body; but the fact is that they are going in driblets, and reluctantly, and when Sunday comes round the exiles hurry back to the poor home, the burnt-up field and the red idol as fast as their feet can carry them.

AHMEDNAGAR, 27 *March.*

III

THE PENAL MINIMUM

I MUST pause for a moment to return to a question which I have already touched upon—a question which impresses me more and more as one of extreme urgency, and which, in the face of the outbreak of cholera, it is impossible to leave over for more mature investigation—I mean the penal minimum. But first one word as to the Famine Code. The Famine Code for the Bombay Presidency is an elaborate document with an index of twenty-four pages and minute directions concerning every department of relief. It is rigid, definite, and all-embracing—a complete system designed to foresee and overcome every emergency. I refer to the Code before coming to the question of the penal minimum in order to dispel certain illusions as to the safeguards which the

document sets up against harsh and ill-considered action. I suggest to the collector or the engineer that the penal minimum is likely to bear hardly on the weak and unfit, and they refer me at once to the Code or to their instructions based upon the Code. They point out that a careful system of grading is there laid down, that new-comers go into a class where the work is easy and are moved up into another class where the work is harder, and that the unfit are set to work by themselves on an assured minimum or allowed to do nothing. All this is excellent on paper, and might be infallible in practice if the famine service did not happen to be overworked and understaffed to a degree which makes anything approaching close or constant supervision impossible. The service is short of administrators, short of engineers, short of doctors, short of medical assistants, short of material, short of tools for the workers. Every one is pegging away at top pressure in a superbly cool and cheerful fashion that neither plague, nor famine, nor cholera, nor a tropical temperature, nor all four together, seem able to perturb; and the native officials, so far as I have been able to see, are

working splendidly. But just as drill-books are apt to be forgotten in a battle, so the most beautiful of regulations may be overlooked in a famine, especially when officers are lacking. If I appear to be somewhat critical in what follows, I am certainly not criticising the men who are toiling night and day to keep the people alive. My only fear is that their faith in a system is leading them into deep waters.

Now, a very few hours on a single famine camp—and I have studied several camps before writing these lines—is enough to show that between the principles and the practice of the Code a wide margin may, and often does, exist. To take a few instances, the Code assumes—and I as a humble student of the Code assumed too—that huts were provided in all cases at the famine camps. In the Ahmednagar collectorate they are so provided; in the Poona collectorate they are not. Then, as to fuel, the Code recommends that arrangements be made for providing the people gratis. I have not found as yet one camp where this is done. At some camps fuel is sold, at others the people are left to collect it for themselves—at their peril. A small thing, perhaps the reader will say; but

no, it is not a small thing if you are living on tenpence a week with a purchasing power of fivepence, and you find one morning that your wages are to be cut down by at least 25 per cent. Every penny, remember, represents a day's food, and if a penny is to be spent on firewood, the fact that the Code does not contemplate such expenditure does not make good the loss of a day's victuals. Again, the Code lays it down that care should be taken to see that every one has a blanket, but so far as I have been able to observe, there is a grievous lack of blankets in some of the camps, and too many of the people in camp have worn their clothes to shreds.

Even more important is the question of the price of grain, on which the wages are computed. At the present moment 16 lbs. to the rupee is a general price, and every worker is supposed to be able to go to the authorised dealer and buy at that rate. But at a camp near Poona a subordinate official volunteered the information that people there could only buy 14 lbs., and that if they bought on credit they got 1 lb. or ½ lb. less. Here was a serious hitch; and how is one to know that similar hitches do not occur

elsewhere? Another discrepancy between Code and practice comes out in the payment of wages. The Code recommends that payment should be made at least as often as twice a week. But the practice is to have a single weekly payment. The results are most serious, as the people are unable to trace the relation between task and wages, and worse still, they get into the grip of the bunya, who takes the wages and gives them what he chooses. I pass by the Code provision for the suspension and remission of land revenue, as this is a matter on which I fear I shall have to write at length. But I may say here that whilst the Code provides in a specific manner for the relief of taxation in a period like the present, no attention is being paid to its instructions, and the collection of revenue is going steadily on.

These considerations have a direct bearing upon the reduction of the minimum wage by 25 per cent. If one felt assured that the Code, so to speak, enacted itself, and that the punishment was only to be meted out to proved skulkers—of whom, no doubt, there are plenty on the works—it would be one thing, though I submit a doubtful one. But I contend that there

is no machinery for adequate discrimination, and that, good as the intentions of the authorities may be, it is inevitable that this penalty should fall on the wrong heads, on the evil and the good alike, and on women and children who are in no condition to bear it. Remember, for one thing, that the individual punished is one of a gang of thirty, over which he has no more control than the thirtieth part of a voice. But now let us see what the penal minimum is, and to do this we must go back to the normal minimum, laid down some years ago by the Government, and confirmed by the recent Famine Commission, in the following terms :—

"In respect to the standard to be adopted we accept without hesitation as sufficient, and not more than sufficient, the full and minimum rations laid down by the Government of India in the Provisional Code, which were based upon the suggestions of the Famine Commissioners, and were the result of much practical Indian experience and expert inquiry. The only alteration we propose is a very small addition to the extra items of the minimum ration."

I had better give the ration, the equivalent of which is, as I have pointed out, paid in money : 15 ozs. common grain, 2 ozs. pulse, ½ oz. salt, ½ oz. ghi, or oil, ½ oz. condiments and vegetables,

with 5 per cent. to be added for margin. Is this an excessive allowance? Its money equivalent at present prices works out at 10½ annas a week, without taking into account the margin which has been knocked off the Bombay Code. Is that in itself other than a penal minimum ration—a ration which is bound to leave the worker hungry and reduced? The Government has lately, in view of the high price of grain, increased the allowance to prisoners from an anna and a half to two annas and a half a day, and one would think that a minimum of some 70 per cent. below convict subsistence was not too much to allow to people who have been exhausted by years of acute privation. Let me add that it was a reduced ration on a rather more generous scale than the present penal allowance that was held accountable for the epidemics which swept off multitudes of famine workers in previous famines.

Any one can calculate for himself how the minimum given above will look with 25 per cent. knocked off, but it is enough to say that the penal wages come to 7½ annas a week for grown people in the Poona collectorate and 8¼ annas in works near Ahmednagar. I go back

for a moment to the camp at Uruli, which with two adjacent camps began upon the penal wage the week I visited them. I went through the muster rolls with the aid of the officials, and I found that out of the whole number 180 persons were earning a weekly wage of one rupee and half an anna (between the maximum and the minimum), 900 persons were earning the minimum of 10½ annas, and 1100 were getting the penal minimum of 7½ annas. It should be explained that about a third of the recipients of the minimum and the penal minimum were children, and their wages in the case of the lowest class came to only 4½ annas for the week. Seeing also that more than half the adults are women, I think it must be admitted that the punishment is indiscriminate as well as severe. Of course it may happen that the black sheep will accomplish the stipulated task under the goad of downright starvation, but it is an experiment which one rather dreads to see going on in a country where the people are worn to the bone with exhaustion, where plague and small-pox are rife, and where cholera is beginning its march through the famishing districts. Allowing for

the item of fuel, and for the bunya's deductions for giving credit, the sole subsistence of grown-up persons is considerably less than 1 lb. of grain per diem. And it was the 1 lb. ration that played such havoc in previous famines. If this matter should chance to be taken up at home, it might be well to ascertain if the Government consulted the medical authorities before taking action, and what views those authorities expressed. But, apart from the risks of cholera and the defiance of the laws of life, it is surely hard measure for the Government which assumes the guardianship of the starving native to punish him for the non-fulfilment of his allotted task by putting him on less than half the rations allowed for the subsistence of convicts. Is it impossible to devise a better means than this for making famine labour productive?

You may be told at home that the Commission which I have quoted admitted that a discretionary power might be left in the hands of the Government of India—a power to be used in the last resort for varying the minimum and maximum rations to the extent of 25 per cent. This is so; but I submit that from the Commission's own standpoint, and having

regard to their verdict that the authorised minimum was not more than sufficient, the reduction can only be regarded as the outcome of a policy of panic or despair. To sum up, then: taking into account the chapter of accidents to which a vast extemporised machinery of relief is liable, the deduction is far larger than it looks on paper. The 5 per cent. margin assumed by the Commission is struck off; there is the liability to overcharges, credit prices, and short weight on the dealer's part and to peculation by the lower officials, and there is the necessity of getting fuel somehow if the food is to be cooked. What is left to the famine worker—or famine idler, if you please—when the feast is spread, is a ration which, I repeat, can only unfit him for work at the same time that it lays him open to the attack of the famine diseases that are lying in wait for him. If I am wrong, all I can say is that the last Commission and the one before that were wrong, and that the distinguished men who appreciated and enforced the lessons gained in previous famines at a cost of life and suffering which horrified the world were also wrong.

NASIK, 30 *March*.

IV

LIFE ON THE RELIEF WORKS

In the collectorate of Ahmednagar I found more than one in four of the population getting Government relief, the greater part of the people on relief being engaged in stone-breaking or earth work in the thirty famine camps scattered about the district. About half the famine labour in this district is employed on stone-breaking and road-making, the other half —a larger percentage than usual—going to the far more suitable and profitable work of digging, carrying, and embanking in connection with schemes of irrigation and water supply. It ought to go without saying that when India asks for bread it is better that she should receive water than stones. The ten years' stock of "metal," which, so far as I can see, will be the chief monument of the famine, will be largely

wasted, whereas the water schemes, supposing only one out of ten to be carried through before the next famine comes, will lessen the area of want and sprinkle the rainless districts with a few patches of green. Throughout the greater part of the Deccan the only chance of extending the water storage arises when the forced labour of famine is available; and, this being so, you would think that the task of setting a famine to catch a famine would be the leading idea of those who are responsible for the programme of relief. But for one reason or another stones are more in favour than water, and I question whether these parts of India will be the richer by many trickles of water for all the labours and contrivings of these terrible months. A dam will be raised a trifle here or there; scores of paper schemes will get themselves outlined, so to speak, in earth; and then the people will go back to their villages, and the works will have to wait for the next patch till famine comes again. Whether a certain number of "productive," as opposed to the purely "protective," works will be kept in hand when the famine is over remains to be seen; but if one may judge by

past experience, the outlook is none too hopeful.

Apart from this drawback there is no question as to the superiority of earth work to stone-breaking as an employment for the people in camp. It is unskilled and comparatively light work, whereas stone-breaking is an art; and an art without teachers takes time to pick up, and is a cruel business at best when payment is by results. It was a pleasant change to find oneself away from the clink of hammers, watching the files of workers with their head-loads of earth and the squads of diggers busy at work. A couple of miles outside Ahmednagar they are making a huge reservoir to supply the town and cantonment, which at the present moment are in straits for water—such straits that the travellers in the dak bungalow are put on short allowance of water, and are lucky if they can get a bath. The huge dam, a mile in length, was alive with people, the white dhotas of the men and the saris of the women looking brilliant against the sky. On closer inspection these same saris turned out to be sadly tattered and faded, but there is this to be said about the dress of the Indian women, that whether you

see it poised like a butterfly over a patch of vivid green, or faded, as I saw it on the works, to the shades of autumn leaves, it is beautiful from first to last. The wearers of the sari had been brought very low before they had taken to the works, and though the number of emaciated figures was not large, traces of privation long endured were plainly to be seen in the files of women and children moving backwards and forwards between the bed of the reservoir and the huge embankment. The earth-carriers struggled slowly, and in the case of the old women with evident pain, over the burning sand and gravel, flocking so close on one another's heels that the row of baskets almost touched. A different procession this, from what the visitor to this old town might see in happier times, when the line of women, pitcher on head, comes marching with stately steps from the village well. The women are still upright, for the burdens of the Indian woman must be borne with head erect; but the lines of long-suffering endurance are cut deeper, and the faces have been dulled into stupor; the large, glassy eyes stare straight in front, and the listlessness of perpetual and

hopeless misery is written in the carriage of these poor people.

After all, one should be thankful that the Government is keeping the people out of the jaws of death ; but look at it as you will, it is impossible to see the peasantry of a country reduced to such a pass, to see wives and mothers and little children toiling for a morsel of bread under a flaming sun, as the Israelites toiled in Egypt, without a sinking of the heart. The camp may be in apple-pie order, as at this Kapurwadi Tank, the smaller children may be filling out under the regular food from the kitchen, as indeed they were, and there may be medicine enough to go round amongst the three hundred patients in the hospital. For all this let us be thankful. But what sort of future, you ask yourself, do the brown, deserted plains around you, or the lands that lie away beyond the hills in Hyderabad, over which thousands of wanderers have been flocking—what sort of future do they hold in store for the refugees and for the two or three hundred millions of others who are always living on the edge of starvation ?

In the evening I went over to another big

camp near Visapur, where a gigantic "bund" is being piled across the path of the river, now dry; and here I found more files of slow-moving figures, basket on head—ten thousand of them, I believe, in all—more diggers, and more huts of matting and bamboo. And here I got a curious confirmation of the vanity of famine works. I asked an official, "What is going to happen to the farmers in the district you are going to flood?" He did not understand the question, and I repeated it. "But it will take two or three more famines to finish," he answered, when he saw the drift of what, I suppose, he thought a rather eccentric question. At the Visapur Tank I noted the exhausting effects of a long day's work in the grilling sun. The people were literally dragging themselves along, and were evidently fagged out. The superintendent of the works is allowing a longer interval in the middle of the day, and he would like to guarantee a three hours' rest when the sun is at its height, such as the people are used to take when employed on field work. The difficulty about this is that the working day is so much cut into that there is barely time for getting through the work.

There is no complaint, I believe, on the score of the people's laziness on these particular works—indeed, I fancy that this charge is mainly levelled against the stone-breakers—but in the week before my visit 2023 people had got the minimum, and 1720 the penal minimum. At other works, too, I have found the number of "penal minimums" going up with the thermometer, and kind-hearted superintendents divided in their minds between the manifest need for giving the people rest and the equally obvious duty of allowing them the chance of earning a little more than the penal dole of seven annas and a half a week. I ought to repeat, perhaps, that most of the English officials with whom I have discussed this urgent matter are convinced that the code device for putting the weakly into a separate class is sufficient to prevent the deserving from suffering hardship. To which I can only reply that, so far as I can see, the famine-machinery is essentially an engineering one: the civil officer appointed for the grading of the workers is subordinate to the supervisor of works, and it would be absurd to pretend that he is generally qualified to judge of the condition of

the people; the medical assistant, or compounder, cannot properly look after his sick and visit the "huts and haunts"—to quote the Code—of anything from ten to twenty thousand persons, even on the magnificent salary of forty rupees a month. No, the thing has been cut too fine.

The death-rate at Visapur Camp is high. The week before my visit twenty-six children had died of diarrhœa, fifteen of "emaciation" —the word starvation is one that the Government does not sanction—and one of dysentery. The mothers of a batch of famine children were in the hospital crouching over the shreds of skin and bone which lay on the matting at their feet or wrapped in the folds of their saris. The hospital terrifies the women, and the doctor has to hunt about the camp for his patients and compel them to come. The women want to get home to their villages before their children die, but of course this is impossible. They are too poor to pay for wood to burn the bodies, which are carried outside the camp and buried there. As I made my way back after sunset to the station at Visapur the camp fires were being lighted up, the family

parties were mustering round the hut for the evening meal, and the whir of the grindstone and the chatter of the children released from their day's confinement in the kitchen sounded pleasantly. Turning back, as the darkness fell, I saw the hills ablaze with fires. From Ahmednagar I came on by train to Nasik, a town of temples, on the holy river Godavari. The river, for the first time in the memory of man, has ceased to flow. A dam has been thrown across it above the town to collect what was left of the waters for the needs of the Nasik people, and enough is left for immediate necessities and to allow of feeding the tanks in the centre of the bazaar, where the washing and bathing of the town are carried on. In the district of Nasik nearly 100,000 people have come upon relief, but the irrigation system established in parts of the collectorate has helped to ease the situation, and it is worth noting that the Palked and Ozartamat Canals, which water an area of twenty square miles, have been working effectively. These canals are fed from the catchment area in the Ghauts, an almost untapped source of water, and there is no doubt whatever that enough water

could be caught in the hills and run down to the Deccan to irrigate large areas of the rainless plains. Little, however, can be done so long as irrigation is expected to show an instantaneous return.

The day before I got to Nasik cholera had made its appearance in the town, which is hard upon a place that has only just shaken off an attack of plague. At the collector's office of the taluka, the mahars—village servants—were assembled in scores with the revenue from the villages, and the Brahmin clerks were busy stacking piles of rupees. Yet in this same district, where the pinch was not severely felt in the earlier months of the famine, relief works were to be started shortly. Such are the ironies of the Indian famine.

ON THE ROAD TO KHANDESH, 31 *March*

V

A ROAD OF SORROW

THE drive of thirty-four miles from Chalisgaon to Dhulia, one of the taluka towns of Western Khandesh, gave evidence enough and to spare of the state to which famine has reduced the richest district in the Deccan. Khandesh was thought to be proof against any serious famine, for it has a fertile soil, and enjoys, as a rule, a sufficient rainfall. When the poorer provinces of the Deccan were suffering from the famine of 1896–7, Khandesh had only 16,000 people on relief works, and the official estimate for the present year, when things are indefinitely worse, was 33,000. The forecast was strangely wrong, for a quarter of a million men, women, and children have found their way to the famine camps, and there is another

10,000 in the villages—the old, the blind, and the village servants retained for village purposes —who get their dole of grain from Government. The happy district, which may be said to be almost a stranger to famine, finds itself naked and helpless, like its famine-seasoned sisters of the Deccan, stripped at once of all reserves of fodder, food, cash, and even credit. There must be something wrong with India when one finds a collapse like this. The road along which I drove the other morning was a dismal one to travel over—brown wilderness spreading to right and left as far as the hills, and scarcely a soul or a beast to be seen on the country-side. Cattle were snuffing at the fallen leaves by the roadside, on the chance of finding a few worth munching here and there. Outside the station we had passed five children—threads of creatures—making a move in the direction of the bunya's grain-heaps, to forage for breakfast, I suppose. People in these parts tell me that it is no uncommon thing to see the children following a cart and picking like birds at any stray grains of corn or rice that fall in the dust. I myself have seen the babies on the works grubbing round the bunya's stalls, and getting their

mouths all slobbered with earth in the process. We met a train of bullock waggons coming into town with loads of leaves, which are in great request for fodder; so much so that trees are being destroyed in thousands by the ruthless stripping of branches. The avenue we drove along had been badly handled, the branches of many of the trees being torn and ripped from the trunks as though a hurricane had passed.

The beasts on the Dhulia road were to be pitied; they were bearing their sufferings as submissively as their masters, allowing themselves to be pushed and pulled and almost lifted along the road to market. Here was a pair of bullocks, weak as water, yoked to a waggon-load of hides, whilst further on a woman strode along with a bundle of stiffened skins upon her head. One bullock waggon had a strange load—the wreck of a splendid beast, with the glaze of death over its eyes. Another bullock had fallen upon the road, and lay there, too weak to get up again. As we crawled along the burning road I thought of Zola's description of the mad stampede of the starving cavalry horses after Sedan, and the rage

and clamour of the hungry soldiers shut up in their island outside the town. Here the people and the cattle are suffering and dying without tears or moans. The silence is unbroken. It is a tragedy that sickens and depresses all the more because it is voiceless. I have seen just two women and a boy shedding tears of disappointment because the sahib did not listen to their plea for food. I have seen the people lifting their hands to heaven and throwing themselves on the ground in the hope of gaining the Englishman's ear; but that is the common Oriental fashion, and there is nothing in it. As to the people on tramp to the works, whom we passed about every mile or so, nothing could be more prosaic or further removed from the drama. Here in Khandesh each family had actually got a deal box of its own, which the father carried on his head, an indubitable sign of the wealth and respectability of the district. Perhaps, thought I, the gaunt old fellow by the roadside, in the red turban who, with his wife, was watching a woman's figure collapsed at his feet, would rush out and seize the horses' heads, and in the name of God insist on food and help for his dying daughter.

The red turban did lift as we went by, and the arms shot up for a moment and then fell again. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" he seemed to be asking. "Nothing," said the dropped arms and hanging head. It is idle to try to imagine the feelings of people who are half comatose with famine; but the stupor and the silence are horrible, and you wish that the unspoken horror of these sapping months could be given some sort of a voice.

Dhulia was hot when we got there at midday —114 degrees in the shade—hot and infested with beggars, and short of water, and with nine hundred criminals, tried and untried, in a gaol that was built for two hundred, and with a touch of cholera in the gaol and in the town. Life in a taluka town is no joke, even for the well-to-do in these days. At Dhulia the traders were working to relieve the distress. I saw their distribution of "breads" to the crowd, including stalwart beggars and children glistening with fat, as well as poor wretches in the last extremity of emaciation, and children spotted with small-pox pustules, to whose presence in public, at first a trifle disturbing,

you soon get accustomed. Dhulia has its share of Bhils in the neighbourhood. Many of them were amongst the eaters of the merchants' bread, and how many more were in the gaol when I visited it on Sunday I should not care to say. What surprises me, however, is not the number of Bhils who go to gaol, but the fact that so few of the population are candidates for such a pleasant place. The gaol is far cooler than the sites of famine camps, which are always exceedingly hot and unsheltered; and then the work is light and the daily ration is double that of the famine minimum, and a good deal more than double the penal minimum. The day being Sunday, the criminals of Dhulia, including a real live money-lender, described to me as the terror of Khandesh, were going to dine on mutton. The ordinary week-day fare is as follows:—1 lb. 8 ozs. flour or jowar, 5 ozs. pulse, 8 ozs. vegetables, and oil into the bargain. India must be an honest country to resist such a bill of fare. And now that the Government has, as I hear, doubled the task of work demanded of the stone-breakers—because, apparently, at a camp where the stone was

soft the people took to earning maximum wages—it is little short of a moral miracle that there should be no rush for the chaste refinements and the simple but plenteous larder of Dhulia gaol.

DHULIA, KHANDESH, 3 *April.*

VI

CHOLERA IN KHANDESH

FROM the bungalow where I write these lines I look out westward over a plain of black-soil country to the rampart of the Satpura hills, blurred through the sand-cloud. Further off to the south is the Ahkrani, marked by mountains of the faintest blue, and between me and the hills runs the river Tapti, one of the few rivers that really do run in these dry days. The plain is good growing ground for cotton in an ordinary year, and Bhil labourers work in the villages for the Mahratta and Gujer farmers; but away in the hills the Bhils who do not toil or spin have their haunts and hunting-grounds, while those of them who have taken seriously to cultivation plough their lands and buy their cattle from Government by instalments. If I turn my head I see within a

mile of me the spurs of the Western Ghauts, which form the frontier of another hunting-ground of the hill Bhils—a country abounding with tigers, panthers, and bears. The plain between these ranges, up which the spirals of dust go pirouetting, is not without attractions in the way of dacoity, of which profession the Bhils are masters. Yesterday evening I looked in at the Courthouse and found the Mamlotdar engaged with no fewer than twenty-nine gipsy-looking fellows charged with a night descent on a farmer's house and the removal of his rice, rupees, and ornaments, all tenderly but firmly done, as the way of these robbers is.

These are the people who have felt the smart of famine most acutely. Their crops have failed, their beasts have died ; there is little left to steal ; the labourers have forsaken the villages since the farmer's store of grain gave out ; and now that meat is getting scarcer—it can still be bought for about a halfpenny a pound, though the doctors complain that putrid biltong is on sale in the bazaar—the position is desperate. As a matter of fact, with all their contrivings the hill Bhils have been starving for months past. The Ahkrani, I am told,

is clean swept for the time being, and the condition of the people in the Satpuras is heart-rending. No one can tell how many have died of famine, but the death-rate of 87 villages in Western Khandesh, amongst which the Bhils have been wandering, is four times as great for January and the first half of February as for the corresponding period last year. Hundreds and hundreds of deaths have taken place from starvation, and till the poor-houses were opened the other day at this town and near Taloda, sixteen miles away, the bodies of the starved Bhils were found every day upon the roads.

The most urgent business of the moment is the outbreak of cholera which is now attacking one famine camp after another in West Khandesh. The catastrophe is rendered the more serious by the awful sufferings which the people have endured since the outbreak of the famine, and by the difficulty of concerting relief measures for the hill Bhils, which has been extreme. They are unused to regular work and routine, and the notion of going to a famine camp, especially if the camp be off their beat, is a terror to them. Works

were opened south of the Tapti at Talwada Tank—where fifty men are now busy digging graves for the cholera victims—but nothing would induce the Bhils to cross the river into this strange country. When at last the Government started relief works near Taloda a percentage of the hill folk went to them, but then came cholera and panic, and the poor wretches are dispersed again over the country-side, wandering from village to village, leaving their dead by the roadside and carrying the cholera with them wherever they go. Down in the little town of Nandurbar, with its eight thousand people, there were twenty deaths from cholera yesterday. Now, as a last resort, the Government is opening poorhouses, where food is given without a test. The one at Nandurbar consists of a few huts of matting and bamboo set up in the compound of a cotton-ginning factory, with a larger hut for a kitchen and a hospital of the same pattern for cholera, dysentery, and other famine diseases. By day the inmates of the poorhouse are clustered in the shelter of the banyans, while the newcomers who have wandered in from the surrounding country lie about the gateway

IN THE POORHOUSE AT NANDURBAR.

of the compound, collapsed with hunger and weariness. I found the people waiting for their evening meal. The greater part of them were starved to the bone. Skeleton mothers were trying to keep the life in their babies—anatomies rather than living creatures; rows of emaciated children sat in silence, some of them clasping their heads in their hands, and with eyes tight shut, others asleep in the dust. There were old women shrivelled and sunken beyond belief, turned almost to mummies by the famine, blind men, and men whose eyes and speech showed that they were starved into imbecility, and here and there a figure, common enough on the famine works, covered with the pustules of small-pox. Altogether it was as forlorn a company as St. Francis could have wished to tend. And, worst of all, the cholera was there.

I came up here from Dhulia with Dr. Farrar, the famine medical officer for West Khandesh, and he has told me the details of the outbreak at Devala camp, not far from Taloda. He had visited the camp and gone away, when he was recalled by an urgent message that forty deaths from cholera had taken place, and that

out of 4000 people on the works 3000 had fled to the jungle. Dr. Farrar went over, and found the rest of the people clamouring for their wages and restless to be off. All over the camp the people were lying dead or dying. In a nullah a dozen were found dead and another dozen dying, whilst a heap of bodies had been already collected for burning. Dr. Barve and the civil officer, Mr. Balaji Hari, stuck to their posts throughout, and Dr. Farrar helped them to get hold of men to undertake the work of collecting and burning the bodies; it was also arranged that some one should be engaged to look after the patients and the children who had left the camp. The frightened Bhils fled to their villages or to the towns in the neighbourhood, and the bodies of many of them had been found about the roads, and even in the market square of Taloda.

With such a scattering as this, it was certain that the cholera would spread, even if other causes had not been at work. It has spread to Serai, whither 2000 people have fled, and to Talwada works, which are twelve miles from here, amongst the spurs of the Western Ghauts, clearing another 2000 off the works;

and there are other camps, whose names I have not by me, where the scourge has made its appearance. As I left the Nandurbar poor-house I passed a party of Brahmins burning the body of Sitaram Bhargar, an official from Talwada Tank, who was seized with cholera early in the morning while engaged in his duties at the relief works and sent to Nandurbar in the hope of saving his life. Next day we took the news of his death to his colleagues at Talwada—a model camp, with excellent supervision, but which has been hard smitten within the last few days. On the 29th of March, 2 children were seized with cholera; on the 30th, 53 children and 1 woman; on the 31st, 55 children, 6 women, and 3 men; on the 1st of April, 37 children, 16 women, and 10 men; and on the 2nd, which is the latest day for which I have a record, 39 children, 22 women, and 17 men. I hardly have the heart to describe what I saw in the cholera huts and on the ground around them to which the stricken creatures had crawled. In one hut a whole family—father, mother, and two or three children—lay collapsed together; in another, a brother and sister lay side by side, and the

father was dead; in another, three children and their mother were all down with it together. No Englishmen could have done their duty more thoroughly than the chief native officials. Vishnu Sadashir Khadilkar, the overseer, Hurguvand Dhaneshwer, the doctor, and Balvaht Trimball Niphadker, the civil officer, had beaten back a desperate outbreak of small-pox, which had attacked six hundred and carried off a hundred people in the camp, when the cholera appeared; but, nothing daunted, they took steps for allaying panic, evacuating the huts, and guarding the water supply, and I found the work going forward at the Tank as though nothing unusual was happening. At the shrine of a deserted village which stands in the middle of the camp a Brahmin was pouring water over a garland of leaves in honour of Maruti, the god of faithful service, a piece of ritual that seemed to me worth noting. But it was impossible to give proper attention to the people. At intervals the dispenser came round with the medicines, and food was served out, but the sick were left to suffer and die as best they might. There is not what we at home should call a nurse in all the famine camps in

India. The native women will do little or nothing, and the doctor is only able to come out twice a week from the town here to see how things are going on. The same scenes will in all probability be repeated in scores of famine camps. And now arises the question, Is it necessary that the people whom we have saved from famine should be left to die like sheep of disease; that little children should moan themselves to their last sleep, as I have seen them do, curled up on the earth alone, except for the company of a group of men and women collapsed with cholera, with no one by even to wipe the flies from their mouths? The Government, whose resources have been strained to breaking-point over the famine, will be helpless against the cholera. Can England do nothing to show these wretched people that we care for them in their extremity?

NANDURBAR, KHANDESH, 6 *April.*

VII

SOME VILLAGE BUDGETS

I WANTED to know how the cultivators were faring in the villages round Nandurbar, and the following notes of a talk I had with a group of farmers by the well at the village of Nagbode will show that the battle with famine is a hard affair, even for the men of substance.

Mathan, a man of thirty, owned five bullocks last year. Three died from want of water, one was killed by the Bhils, and one was left. The survivor was trying to get on its feet at the moment we began our conversation, and Mathan went to help it up—by the tail. Mathan farms 60 acres, but had no produce this year. The land is mortgaged, and he is living now as a labourer. With no water and no bullocks, he can do nothing on his own land. Last year, after paying 116 rupees for land

revenue (on 84 acres), 100 rupees to a money-lender, and some barley to two servants, he had 70 rupees left for himself, his son, and two daughters. His wife is dead. He has been called upon to pay his revenue this year, but has not done so.

Murar the Patel, a young man, farms 60 acres, but there has been no produce this year. The farm is mortgaged to the extent of about 3000 rupees. He estimates last year's produce at 375 rupees, of which he paid 104 rupees to Government. He had to buy four bullocks for 100 rupees, and pay 40 rupees for servants, and was therefore unable to pay anything to the money-lender. The other expenses of cultivation amounted to nearly 60 rupees. He kept the rest for himself, his wife, uncle, and two children. He has been served with notice of assessment. He had six bullocks, and has lost four.

Laxman has 84 acres ; his crops have failed ; he has lost four out of eight bullocks ; three are in a condition to work, and one is at the point of death. He is indebted on his personal security for 700 rupees. He had nothing left for paying the money-lender last year after

payment of the Government assessment—150 rupees—expenses of cultivation, etc.

Nathu farms 39 acres. His crops failed, and five bullocks out of six have died. After paying the Government 60 rupees last year, there remained only 40 or 50, and he had to go out to labour to keep his wife and five children. His farm is mortgaged for 700 rupees.

Three of these men, with two others, Annaji and Zuga, had taken the bit of garden round the well, lent to them rent-free by an absentee cultivator, and were doing their best with it, but they did not see how they could hold on for more than another month. They have no grain at home, and some of the cooking-pots have been sold.

A bullock cart came by, and some farmers from Sarvala, a village eight miles off, seeing us talking, pulled up to see what it was all about. "Would they be willing to say how things were going with them?" I asked through the interpreter. They made no objection.

Gutal farmed 225 acres, and had no crops. He had 100 beasts last year, bullocks, buffaloes, and two horses, and has lost 70. Last

year's crops were worth from 1000 to 1200 rupees. He paid 500 rupees to the Government and 500 for labour, and borrowed money for maintenance.

Dulladha owns 135 acres, and has lost 15 cattle out of his stock of 22. After paying assessment—350 rupees—last year, and the expenses of the farm, he was able to pay his way with the help of his family working on the farm. His ancestral debt is 5000 rupees, and up to last year he has paid interest on it in money or in kind.

The third Sarvala man was in good circumstances, and his companions discreetly moved away after explaining that his maternal uncle had left him great riches, and such was my own embarrassment that I forgot to take down his name. The prosperous nephew owns 300 acres, but this year there was no produce, and out of 120 beasts 20 remained, the others having died for want of fodder.

The three had been served with notices. I did not see the actual document, but the following is a literal translation of the Mahratti from a copy which I have since obtained :—

NOTICE.

A.B. Inhabitant of
Village .....
Taluka .....
District .....

You are informed that the land marginally noted and the assessment marginally noted are in the revenue records. The assessment for instalment of year, being Rs. , was due on , and you have not paid it yet. This notice is therefore given to you that if the instalment of Rs. , and the notice fee , total , is not paid within ten days from the date of this notice, stricter measures will be taken according to the law, and the whole assessment for the current year will be recovered at once, and you will be liable to pay as fee on account of the non-payment of instalment.

Date, ...

Cold comfort this for people who are brought as low as the peasants of France before the Revolution, who have ruin and hunger as their daily portion, while plague and cholera stand over them ready to strike. To them appears the Government of the British Empire in the li .eness of the broker's man. The Government may explain that what it wants is to get the money from those who can afford to pay, and especially from the bunya. To which I would reply that recovery from the bunya will in

nine cases out of ten only increase the burdens of the cultivator, that it is impossible to discriminate between those who are able to pay and those who are not, and that even if the selection could be managed with a certain rough justice, the sight of Government beginning to distrain—I hear of "examples" being made as I travel about the country—will break what little is left unbroken in the hearts of the people, and lead them to suppose that their own homes and lands are going to follow.[1]

[1] The following is a translation of a Gujerati handbill issued by a native revenue official for the information of the village revenue collectors. The collector referred to is the collector of Broach in Gujerat. The circular is part of a mass of evidence bearing on the collection of land revenue during the famine, placed before Lord Northcote by the Hon. Mr. Parekh :—

"GOVERNMENT THROUGH MAMLATDAR OF ANKLESAR.

"The Talati and Patel of Mouje are informed that the Circular Order, No. 257, of April 14th, 1900, of the collector is as follows :—'I think that it is in the minds of the people, that if Government assessment is not paid the lands will be forfeited, but they will be given back without payment. This belief is quite wrong, and it appears that it has produced a bad effect; therefore you are written to inform the people that if lands are forfeited for non-payment of Government dues, they will not be restored back; but they will pass with right of possession to persons who make the highest bids at the auction sales, and therefore they will lose their lands. You will make them understand this, and try to make revenue recoveries as early as possible; order to this effect has been received, therefore you should cause a public proclamation to be made for information of the people in this matter.'

"Dated *April* 15, 1900."

VIII

IN THE GARDEN OF INDIA

I CAME on here from Nandurbar, passing through Surat, where the famine is only slightly felt, and spending a couple of days at Broach, which is the richest district in Gujerat—Gujerat, as everyone knows, being famous as the garden of India. One terrible thing about the situation here is the shock the famine has given to the people. It is the first famine in Gujerat within the memory of living man, and it has paralysed the cultivators. They waited on their farms till November and December in the hope of rain, refusing to believe that Gujerat was destined to go dry like the famine-seasoned tracts. Before they gave up hope the beasts were dying about the roads. The big bullocks that plough and draw the water from the wells and haul the heavy waggons were getting thinned off, and the cows and buffaloes that are turned out in

droves to fend for themselves could find no grass to eat. It is estimated, indeed, that not more than 10 per cent. of the brood cattle will survive the famine. People who know the district tell me that the fodder famine has hit Gujerat harder than the famine of water or food. The Government did its best to lessen the blow. Cattle camps were opened, and fodder from the Government forests was offered for sale below cost price. Arrangements were made for drafting 15,000 cattle to Thana forests, two hundred miles south, but rinderpest and the strange food and soil have played havoc with the poor beasts, and not many are likely to return. A great deal, too, was accomplished by private charity. I have heard of one native gentleman who has been keeping the life in 13,000 cattle without charging the farmers a single anna for fodder, and four of the five cattle camps at Ahmedabad are being run by private individuals. Somebody in the Government service suggested that prickly pears would do for cattle food if the thorns could be removed, but before this discovery the cattle were eating the pears and chancing the thorns. At the camp at Broach, by the Nerbudda, I found a lot of bullocks

breakfasting in comfort off prickly pear, the thorns having first been burned away and the fruit slightly toasted in the process.

If people are dying by the thousand as they are now in Gujerat, I suppose it is largely because the cattle, the mainstay of the farm, have famished before them. I hear that numbers of people who have a beast or two left will not leave the cattle even to save their own lives. It is a common thing for beast and man to starve and die together. The pass that things have come to in the garden of India may be gathered from a notice which has just been issued by Mr. Lely, the Commissioner, the substance of which I give:—

"CAMP SURAT, *March* 31, 1900.

"Numerous deaths occur among people who wander about the country without food, and are attracted at last towards some town or large village. Ignorant of the relief provided by Government, or unwilling to go to it, they linger on the roadside or in the fields until they die of starvation. This is not only in itself a regrettable loss of life, but it creates a public scandal and discredits the arrangements made by the local officers. The Commissioner thinks a rough ambulance system should be established at every poorhouse and kitchen (whether on a relief work or not), and at every town or large village where there may be no poorhouse

or relief work, but where famished vagrants are likely to be found. At all these places as many stretchers as may be needed should be kept. They can be made very easily and cheaply of two stout bamboos and a piece of canvas. They are kept already in many places, but they should henceforth be part of the regular equipment of every poorhouse and kitchen—as much as the hutting,—and should be charged to the general cost. The bearers should be provided as follows:—In kitchens, on relief works, a sufficient number should be told off to each stretcher from the relief workers. In poorhouses a sufficient number should be added to the staff to man the requisite number of search parties, and charged to the general establishment. In municipalities which contain no poorhouses, and especially in those near which there is a relief work kitchen, the duty of keeping up a sufficient number of bearers fairly belongs to the municipality, who should be asked with the least possible delay to organise search parties and have exhausted wayfarers carried to the nearest place where they will be attended to. For every poorhouse or kitchen in or near a municipality, certain areas all round the town should be roughly indicated, and they should be examined at fixed intervals by search parties, consisting of bearers with one or two stretchers, accompanied by some respectable person. Each area should be searched every other day, or more. In villages the Patel should have the fields surrounding the village searched every day."

A glance into the hospital at a poorhouse, or a relief work, is enough to fill in the rest of the

picture. It is no good dwelling on such scenes, but I confess that I had not realised the full measure of the catastrophe in Gujerat, till I saw the rows of famine-gnawed wanderers dying in the hospitals at Broach and Ahmedabad. At the poorhouse here, which has been fitted up in the old gaol, there were thirty-six "cases" in the serious ward to-day; twelve had died since daybreak, and six had been brought in dead out of the streets. There was no chance, the doctor said, of saving the rest. Old men and children, and men, as years count, in the prime of life, lay on their strips of matting, indifferent to everything. The pain and struggle were over, and the only thing now was to let them die in peace. Two white-robed Sisters of Mercy happened to be passing through the ward at the same time, giving a look or gesture of sympathy to each sufferer. It seemed to me that the sick and dying in the hospitals, and the thousand or so of the indistinguishable starving, who were eating their rice in the gaol quadrangle, became almost personal again as the Sisters passed along.

My pen goes wearily as I settle myself to

record the sad sights I have seen amongst the famine refugees in this sweltering city, the smell of which is like a monkey-house. The ruin of all these hard-working, home-loving creatures is too piteous. The city of mosques and temples, with its East End of cotton factories, is littered with these miserables. Here you find a market established for the sale of bundles of wood, with hundreds of sellers, and scarce a buyer. Elsewhere the people are squatting under the trees making baskets; further on are camps patched up anyhow out of quilts, and blankets, and leaves; here half a dozen men and women are dragging a waggon along, human traction having become a regular calling since the famine carried off the cattle. A long narrow waggon packed with people, like a canoe on wheels, lumbers down the street. It is the municipal ambulance taking the exhausted wanderers to the poor-house. As to the relief agencies, you lose count of them after a few hours of inspection. I have already spoken of the Government poorhouse. There is also the voluntary poor-house by the Sarapur Gate, and there are the municipal relief works, the poorhouse for the

people of the town—who will need relief still more when the twenty-six cotton mills are all shut down,—the collecting ground where new arrivals are brought, fed with parched corn, and drafted off next day to relief works, or poorhouse, according to their condition; and there is the orphanage, with 900 famine children, which the charity of the townsmen has established. Ahmedabad is doing nobly in the crisis, but what can charity do for people who have been living on tamarind seeds, and the roots of the beet grass? The ordinary death-roll of the place is 80 or 90 a week, but since the refugees began to flock in, it has increased to 500.

One word as to the relief works. For some reason, which I have failed to fathom, the people in this district are being treated with exceptional leniency. There is no stone-breaking, most of the workers are paid the maximum wage, and the penal minimum has not been enforced. In Broach, on the other hand, the famine people in the camps to the north of the Nerbudda are faring badly. At a big tank work that I visited, the numbers have been reduced by more than half as a direct result of

MATERIA TANK NEAR BROACH : ON STARVATION WAGES.

the Government's policy of penal tests. Nearly thirty thousand souls were housed at this camp when the word went forth from the head-quarters that the wages must come down, and the task of work be increased. The people at the same time were given the option of moving to a camp some five miles off, on the south of the Nerbudda, where they would receive the old rate of wages, the theory being that the genuinely destitute would accept the offer, while the others would go back to their villages and live on their resources. Unhappily in the case of these works, and of others to which the order applied, the scheme has gone all wrong. Only a small fraction could be induced to cross the river. It was a strange land on the other side, and the people were terrified with fantastic rumours of what awaited them. Agents were going to ship them to the Transvaal, where they were to be put in the front of the British firing line; and so forth. At the time I visited the tank the great majority of the workers who remained were getting the starvation wage of less than an anna a day. As to the rest, some of them have indeed gone home, but only to starve, and others are

wandering about the country and being taken to the poorhouses in the last stages of starvation. It is a horrible story, and one can only hope that the Government will come to realise the true effects of its action while there is still time to repair it.

AHMEDABAD, 12 *April.*

IX

THE PANCH MAHALS

THE Panch Mahals—five districts—is a tract of jungle country in the far eastern corner of Gujerat, dotted about with bits of cultivated land which the Bhils and Kolis have reclaimed from the forest and waste. Here they have built their huts, dug wells, and settled down as people who have a stake in the country and a liability in respect of land revenue. The Bhil of these parts, so far as I can understand him, is a pretty steady-going cultivator, and while he walks about the country with his bow and arrows, which he can use with effect when he chooses, it is probably only his swagger, though he says he does it for self-protection. What wealth there is in the district lies in the timber of the forests, which contain every sort of tree, including a good deal of teak, and in the minerals, which the Government suffers no one

to touch. Even in this jungle the money-lender swarms, and the cultivators grow their crops for his grain heap, and subsist on such bounty as he affords them, quite in the approved fashion. A month in India has been enough to teach me one thing—that the farmer lives by the bunya's sufferance and toils for the bunya's benefit; that land system, law system, revenue system are the parlour furniture of the bunya spider ; and that British railways, canals, officials, roads, police, and the general apparatus of government, down even to the famine organisation itself, make for the enrichment and the greater power of this sinister person. It was the bunya who openly proclaimed the famine in these parts. Towards the end of last year, foreseeing the scarcity, he began to stop the grain allowance to his clients and to store for all he was worth. I have a shrewd suspicion that the bunya has practised the same wiles in other parts of the famine areas, and, for that matter, it is obvious that the man who holds the produce can make the pinch of famine felt pretty much when and how he chooses. Here the bunya's policy was to hasten and aggravate the famine, and he made so little secret about

it that the Bhils came down one day with their bows and arrows on one of the towns, killing a few policemen and demanding food. Raids against the bunya, however, are out of date; the Bhils got nothing from their trip, and now the bunyas are selling their grain at famine prices in exchange for the Government money which circulates in the relief camps.

The shadow of death is on the land to-day. From the windows of the train one sees dying trees mangled by loppings and mutilations, dying cattle, dead fields, and homes of which nothing remains but the empty grain pot, big enough to hold half a dozen of the forty thieves. At the sidings the trucks are being loaded with hides, and stacks of the stiffened skins are heaped about the stations, while literally the only traffic along the road consists of bullock waggons heaped with hides. A month ago whole train loads were being made up at Godhra; a grand cattle-slaying was going forward just outside the town, and the tops of the bushes for a distance round were red with meat drying in the sun. The Bhils came crowding to the killing, and waited till the last beast which could be hurried up in time for the

butcher had died the death—imagine what the scene would mean to the other crowd of Hindoo onlookers—and then dispersed nobody knows whither. But at last the reserves of cattle meat are used up, the trade in small bundles of leaves, grass, and fuel becomes more difficult every day, and though the mowhra flowers are whitening the ground and bringing some relief for the moment, the manna shower will save but few of the starving people who wander about the country or find their way to the works and poorhouses to die. The famine camps and the poorhouses will, without doubt, save many lives, and they would have saved many more but for an unaccountable delay in concerting relief measures. Help has come too late. Even where food is at hand many of the people are too "perished" to be fed up, and dysentery, diarrhœa, and fever are killing their hundreds every day. These deaths will not figure on the Government's reports under the head of starvation; but, not to enter upon a futile controversy, it cannot be denied that the deaths are famine deaths. So much is clear when the sweepers at the Godhra Tank works are picking up some twenty dead bodies about

the camp every day, when the poorhouse has a daily death-list of between thirty and forty, and when the last return from the Jhalod district shows a death-rate which, if continued for a year, would carry off nearly half the people of the Mahal.

Mr. Ward, of the American Methodist Mission, who, at the invitation of Government, has taken over the management of the Godhra poorhouse, took me with him on his visit of inspection on Good Friday. The mission has been doing good work by supplying grain below the bunya's prices, setting people to work on a patch of irrigated land, and affording a temporary shelter for wanderers. I saw two sisters there who had come in the evening before from a village twenty miles away. The girls were far from being emaciated, but they had eaten nothing for four days, and they were sick with fever, from which the younger one has since died. Running about the compound was a plump little girl who had lost her father, mother, and seven brothers and sisters in the famine. A month ago Mr. Ward found her sitting in the fields with the last of the brothers dying in her lap, and there she had been sitting

for two days. Our walk to the poorhouse was rather a ghastly one. We passed the sweepers preparing to burn the bodies of the poorhouse people who had died in the night—eleven corpses, desperately emaciated, and a sack of babies—and came out of the nullah on to a patch of bare ground, where a woman was sitting. Her two babies were in front of her; her sari was drawn over her head, and she was giving vent to a chant of grief, appalling in its desolation. On this spot her husband had died a month before, and the widow, thinking herself alone, was giving herself up to her sorrow. A little further on was a heap of earth, the burial-place of some famine wanderer, covered with thorns to keep the jackals off. Then a stretch of the familiar matting which gives shelter to some five millions of the Queen's subjects came in sight, and we were at the poorhouse. Here we found 200 people collected together in the hospital sheds from the neighbouring Tank works and the wards of the poorhouse. Under Mr. Ward's direction everything was being done for them that could be done. There were native Christian women acting as nurses, who seemed to be doing their

IN THE FAMINE CAMP AT GODHRA.

work conscientiously; and the sweepers, who are supposed to see to the cleaning of the patients, were working under supervision. Another thing that struck me was the way the poorhouse inmates were divided into small detachments, each with its day space and sleeping quarters partitioned off with matting. This is a great improvement on the common plan of herding the people together, and not the least of its advantages is the facility given for finding out the sick, who are always averse from going into hospital, and passing them on at once for treatment. The condition of the people was terrible, half of them at least being the merest skeletons.

At the famine camp outside the town 12,000 people were busy deepening the dry bed of a tank. The work has only been started since the beginning of the month, and in view of the people's condition the Government very wisely began by putting them all on the maximum wage. Last pay-day, however, the wages were cut down to the minimum, with the result that the people fancy they are being robbed. At a similar work at Dohad, 40 miles east of Godhra, which I visited yesterday, the whole

camp took to the jungle when the reduction was made. After a few days, however, they began to return, and I found about 5000 out of 7000 back again at work. I went round the camp during the midday interval, under a scorching sun, and I noticed that numbers of people were grubbing for roots amongst the clods, or working away with their pickaxes at the same job. The children in the kitchen seemed to me to be the worst starved and most neglected-looking collection that I have ever seen in any famine camp. They were having their midday siesta, which no doubt told against their appearance, for the famine sleeper is a more collapsed-looking creature than the semi-comatose famine victim awake. But when the children roused up a little on the approach of the women bringing them water there was hardly a spark of animation amongst them all. They looked weary, listless, and drooping, and many of them had the lines of old age and care on their sunken faces.

There are births in the famine camps as well as deaths, and at Dohad the mothers of two amazingly shrivelled and monkey-like babies were the happiest-looking people in the camp.

And this reminds me of a point as to which I had meant to say a word before. I am afraid it is true that famine often breaks up family affection, and that under its stress children are sold or abandoned or robbed of their food by their parents. When the stomach presses against the spine, the heart may sometimes get displaced. But I have seen much of the other and brighter side of the picture—instance after instance of tenderness and self-sacrifice; and, to learn how suffering may be borne, I say there can be no better school than India. Never was people afflicted like this people; but words cannot describe their patience and resignation, their child-like sweetness and docility, their gratitude for a word or look of comfort. When a man has seen all this, and has seen, besides, half-savage parents with the death-pangs at their heart comforting their dying children, he understands why it is that Englishmen and Englishwomen will work for India till they drop. No; the famine does not always kill the affections. I am writing now with the voice in my ears that I heard this evening at the poorhouse hospital, where the sweepers were pulling a dead child from its

mother's arms. The floor was littered with sixty dying people, and there was silence in the shed—not even a moan or a sob from the figures on the floor,—when the mother's screams of anguish suddenly filled the place.

As we left the shed at sunset there came filing into the compound a procession of the most pitiful phantoms, some thirty of them, starved beyond belief, their lips drawn back over their teeth, their eyes burning with fever in their deep-sunk sockets. Silently they formed up in a row before the Sahibs, and the priests in the little temple across the road began drumming their god to sleep as they stood. Then this famished and exhausted company, mothers and old men, and little boys and elder sisters, sank together to the ground and turned their poor ravaged faces to the Sahibs in submission. "You see us," they seemed to say. "Will the hand of the Sahib be stretched out to save?"

GODHRA, PANCH MAHALS, *Easter Sunday.*

X

THINGS THAT MAKE FOR FAMINE

BEFORE leaving British territory for Rajputana,[1] it may be as well for me to note down my impressions of certain famine phenomena, which are none the less real and cogent because they are unconnected with the failure of the monsoon. Our institutions in India, by some perverse fate, have, I am afraid, entered into a conspiracy with the powers of famine, so that the instant the monsoon fails, millions of the people are hungry. And it is this category of famine conditions as to which I want to say a word in passing, reserving fuller discussion for a later stage.

The first thing that must strike an observer as he goes about the country, is the lack of staying power shown by the cultivating classes. He sees them living on the brink of ruin without reserves of cash, or kind, or credit, and he

[1] The foregoing letters were all written in Bombay Presidency.

asks himself how it is that a generation of railways, and more than a generation of trading with the West, find the people touching bottom, with nothing, and less than nothing, to show for all the exports and imports and internal development. The new commerce, indeed, has gone far to rob the country of its ancient industries, and multitudes of people who used to ply their trades in the villages have been thrown back upon the land. The new finance has robbed the people of a quarter of their savings by depreciating the value of the silver ornaments which fill the place of the Post-office Savings Bank at home. What would the depositor in Manchester say if one fine morning he found that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been forced by considerations of high finance to write his balance down by 25 per cent.? The Indian cultivator is not a luxurious person with many wants. As the camel is to other beasts, so is the ryot in the family of men. He can work, endure, and keep silence on the barest pittance, and if his savings enabled him to put his hand on three halfpence a day in famine times, he would stay at home instead of going to the works. But

even so moderate a reserve as this is in countless cases beyond his command, and every famine finds the numbers on the relief works going up. From the Imperial point of view this lack of staying power ought, one would think, to be a matter of some concern. It shows that for some reason or other the cultivator cannot in good seasons get enough food out of the land to tide him over bad ones, though we force him all the same to scrape rupees enough from his furrows to pay us for governing India.

In Bombay Presidency, where the word has gone forth that every rupee of revenue which can be collected shall be swept into the Treasury, we have an example of the desperate pass to which the country has come. Yet, after all, this policy is only the logical outcome of the British revenue system. Once you grant that a fixed inflexible tribute is the right thing, what objection is there to enforcing it even in famine years? Is not the bad year taken into account when once in thirty years, or possibly less, the assessment is revised? *Ergo*—so runs the official defence—the ryot should be able in the bad year to disgorge from

the surplus he enjoyed in the good one. The only flaw in the argument is that the ryot has not the wherewithal to pay, one reason being that the bunya takes his surplus. It seems to me unprofitable to spend time in debating whether a tax is too high when you know that people cannot pay it, and this is the state of things year in and year out with the mass of the Bombay ryots. The ryot, at any rate, does not pay. The man who pays is the bunya, who is getting the land into his hands as his return. Nothing can be clearer than that our revenue system, coupled with the right we gave the ryot of mortgaging and alienating his land, has become a mighty engine of expropriation. The bunya is indispensable to the Government—any one will tell you that—in his capacity of advancer of revenue. But when the lord-high-raiser-of-the-wind to the Government of India comes upon the scene as landlord, with the man who once upon a time was a ryot as his tenant or labourer, even the high official perceives that he is a dubious sort of benefactor. What seems to me to be as plain as Indian daylight is, that when the wheel comes full circle the resisting power of

the cultivator has gone, and a famine can be declared almost at any time. And the wheel is coming round fast.

I am often told that the real source of the ryot's indebtedness is to be found in his own extravagance, and especially in his passion for marrying off his daughters expensively, and giving his father an elaborate funeral. Excessive sums, I believe, are spent in this way—notably in Gujerat. It is the ryot's one extravagance, but don't let us blame him for it too hastily, or assume that if he buried his father in an inexpensive way, the land question would proceed to settle itself. Look a little way back into history, and you find that these ceremonies are part of the bunya's stock of baits. The whole scale of pomp and cost was raised when we gave the bunya the ryot's land to angle for. It is one of the commonplaces of Indian publicists that this conversion of the right to cultivate land into the right of disposing of it was a fatal error, and when the theory of improvidence is brought forward to account for everything, it may fairly be said that the ryots are no more improvident than any other class would be, which, by no effort of its own, found itself

endowed with property by some process of magic, and surrounded by crafty and obsequious traders offering all sorts of benefits in exchange for a signature to a piece of writing.

But this is, after all, beside the question. "Under the native States," said a man who knows India as few other men know it, "there are laws of leather; in British territory laws of iron." Very well; we substituted for the leather law of payment according to crops the iron law of a fixed tribute, and the inevitable result was, that the people had to borrow in bad years. This inflexible tribute system is the nether millstone, and the gathering burden of indebtedness the upper millstone, with which we are grinding India. Let me give an illustration. There is a native State in Kathiawar, not far from where I write, and into that State in 1882 was introduced the principle of the fixed assessment, and the people were permitted to alienate their land. In 1897 an official of the State, from whom I have the story, went closely into the economic position of the district with which he was familiar fifteen years before, and which at that time was fairly independent of the bunya, and he found that in the

course of those fifteen years the ryots had run up debts, the annual interest on which was equal to the revenue of 300,000 rupees. There is food for thought in this bit of economic history, which is indeed a microcosm of indebted India. I am told that in Upper Burmah, where the money-lender was unknown under native rule, he has come in like a flood since annexation. Wherever you find the iron assessment and the individual property in land, you find the cultivator going down. And remember that behind the bunya and his bonds are ranged all the batteries of our laws. "His Lordship in Council entertains no doubt of the fact," so ran a Vice-regal minute issued thirty years ago, "that the labouring classes of the native community suffer enormous injustice from the want of protection by law from the extortionate practices of money-lenders. He believes that our civil courts have become hateful to the mass of our Indian subjects, from being made the instruments of the almost incredible rapacity of usurious capitalists. Nothing can be more calculated to give rise to widespread discontent and disaffection to the British Government than the practical working

of the present law." The cultivator who lives under British rule, whether direct or reflected in the native State, is, in truth, in a fair way to become a permanently famine-stricken man. You may say that he enjoys the benefits of the British Raj; and so he does, but the economic effect of this privilege has been to set up over him another native prince in the person of the money-lender, who takes his crop when he has one, and in fact behaves himself very much as the wicked old princes are reported to have done, only that he is surrounded by the odour of sanctity. No man, not even a ryot, can serve two such masters and live; and that, and not the poverty of the land, or the population question, is the reason why the ryot has lost his staying power. The British Raj and the Bunya Raj eat up his crops, and what one leaves the other devours.

That is the truth about the ryot's position to-day, and the one gleam of life above the horizon is that the Government seems to be getting alive to it. When the "Pioneer" is angry with the English papers for their talk about the recuperative powers of India, and the Viceroy is pushing through a bill to prevent

the alienation of the Punjaub lands, you feel at least that the official world is not living in a fool's paradise. This is not, perhaps, a great achievement under present circumstances, but it is something, and I should be inclined to rate very high the widespread hope that Lord Curzon's administration is exciting amongst all classes. The question that crosses and comes back to one's mind after a course of famine travel, is, whether any great hope of recovery is left. The man who held on all night to the edge of the pit with the bottom a few inches from his feet, might as well have let go, and Tolstoi's reading of the parable is that the lowest depths of poverty are tolerable compared with the torments of the struggle to avoid them. Why should the ryot hold on to this miserable life? I suppose, however, that the call of the land will be too strong for him, and that we shall find him again when the rains come, toiling, as Sir George Wingate said, that another may rest, and sowing that another may reap. If in the meantime it is realised here, and at home, that the land question, and the debt question, and the revenue question, which are all one, can wait no longer, and it is decided

to apply remedies without thought of anything but the relief of the ryot, and without being frightened at the cost, we may begin to get at the roots of the Indian famine.

GUJERAT, 17 *April.*

XI

THE FAMINE IN THE DESERT

THE famine in Rajputana is like the famine elsewhere in one respect—it is the worst within the memory of man. The distress is worst and widest-spread in the group of States to the west of the Aravali Mountains, and bordering on the desert—States which appear to the eye as a waste of whitish sand; but in a greater or less degree every one of the Native States in the huge territory where the Rajput chiefs hold sway is suffering from failure of water, crops, and fodder. Ajmeer, the British State planted in the midst of Rajputana as an outpost of civilisation, is as badly off as any, and at one time nearly half the population was on the relief works. The report of Colonel Brooke on the famine of 1869—a document which states that Marwar came forward with contributions to the Lancashire famine—gives

a terrible account of the sufferings of that time; and though it is pretty certain that the deaths in this famine will be fewer than they were in 1869, when relief measures were of a perfunctory kind, the loss that must fall upon the people will be far heavier. There is an ascetic in Marwar, 108 years old, who remembers the great famine of 1812, and according to his account there has never been anything to approach the clean sweep that has been made of the cattle in the last nine months.

Here in Marwar—"the place where man dies for want of water"—the calamity is almost insupportable. The people had had a succession of bad seasons, and last year brought no rainfall whatsoever. The merest sprinkle of rain is enough to turn the desert into a tract of grass on which cattle and men can manage to subsist, the seeds of the grass making an excellent porridge. But not a drop fell; not a blade of grass nor a stalk of corn or millet pushed up through the sand, and many of the wells dried up. Then the bunya, according to his kind, began cutting off the supplies of grain to his tenants and bond slaves, and the people were left hungry and helpless, with their cattle on

their hands. It is the custom in Marwar, when famine threatens, for the cultivators and herdsmen to leave their homes and go off with their families, driving their beasts before them, to some country where there is grazing to be had. The Marwaris are great cattle-owners, and their beasts are often enough the only property they possess. For the farmers cultivate just enough to feed the bunyas and themselves, and they only get one crop in the year. At the end of August the stream of emigration began. Thousands upon thousands of Rajputs and Jats, with the lower castes thronging after them, poured out along the roads to Central India, Gujerat, and the North-west. It is believed that 200,000 people went to Malwa, in Central India. Many others went to Indore. Sixty thousand people crossed the waterless desert into Scinde, and another multitude flowed down into Gujerat. All the families who had cattle drove them on before, unless the bunya happened to have seized them for the value of their bones and hides. This exodus is one of the most heartrending chapters of the Indian famine, for the people made their journey only to find another famine at the

journey's end, and they had to turn back again, or wander about in search of food. Their cattle died upon the road or starved in the jungle, and the people died as well, in numbers that will never be known, in the attempt to get back again to their own country. Mothers tramped back with a child or two, the only survivors of the family. The grandfather came back with a grandchild, the boy of twelve without father or mother. I have seen and talked with some of the wanderers who have survived these awful marches, and I suppose that nothing but the grand physique which comes from the life and air of the desert could have made them proof against such hardships. They are a splendid race, these Jats and Rajputs, even now, with the marks of all their sorrows and privations upon them. Of the cattle none have come back, and the State Secretary tells me that 90 per cent. of the whole stock of Marwar have perished—between three and four million head.

About half the cultivating classes—some 500,000 souls—are supposed to have left Marwar in this way, and those who were left in the villages found themselves caught in another

movement which was confined to Marwar territory. The bunyas are notoriously a timorous people, and their nerves are known to be more sensitive in a Native State than in British territory, which is the bunya's paradise. These worthies disliked the idea of being left in the wilderness at a time when public opinion was inflamed against them and the chances of being looted were considerable. What they did, therefore, was to remove themselves and their stores from the villages where they transacted business to convenient spots where they felt strong enough in numbers and position for any emergencies that might befall. And the result was that the villagers had to follow. The bunya, I am often told, is an indispensable man, and in this case he certainly had all the food supplies of the village in his waggons, and there was nothing for it but to trek after him. So it comes about that, whilst numbers of villages are deserted—a fact for which the want of water is also responsible in many cases —others are swollen with a new population, of which the bunya is the leading figure. A town called Balotra, not far from here, which was selected as a likely city of refuge, enjoys

a larger grain market to-day than Jodhpur itself. As to relief measures, two points are pretty clear, and they apply to Rajputana generally. Without the railways, large districts must have been isolated from all possible food supplies, and unless the famine relief had been organised on a generous and effective scale the railways would have been useless, except for carrying away the train-loads of hides and bones. As it is, they have been bringing grain into the country from the North and North-west, and the unfinished railway which is to connect Karachi and Calcutta has been giving a large amount of employment for famine labour. Of course there are plenty of districts far away from the rails, but they are not beyond the reach of camel and railway service combined.

The task of concerting relief measures has been an anxious one for all concerned. The Government of India is not only the governor of British provinces, but the protector of the people in the Native States, and it was bound to see that precautions were taken against the evil day. What was the policy of the native princes going to be? Some of them had no

money in the treasury, others were known or suspected to be indifferent as to what became of their subjects, and not a Rajah had before been called upon to steer his ship through a tempest that threatened annihilation. The Viceroy, at any rate, lost no time in declaring his policy, and he decided early in the day to give the native rulers a strong lead. He offered loans on easy terms to the States that wanted money; he sent to Rajputana, as Famine Commissioner, Major Dunlop-Smith, who won his spurs in Hissar at the last famine in the Punjaub, and he offered the services of Staff Corps men, engineers, and doctors. Nobody could have given more practical or strenuous encouragement to the chiefs, and Lord Curzon may to-day fairly congratulate himself on the way in which his challenge was accepted. With a few exceptions, the princes both in Rajputana and other districts have set manfully to the task of saving life, and so far as I can judge, the famine organisation in Rajputana has been as successful as could be expected. There have been several cases in which the native princes have shown a signal public spirit and capacity for effective

leadership. The young Maharajah of Bikanir took his place at the head of the famine organisation from the start. He set works going in the desert, organised a system of grain supply, and turned over to the famine service the camel corps of the Imperial service which Lord Dufferin invited the Native States to organise. Again, the Maharajah of Marwar, the young nephew of Sir Pertab Singh, found himself with a dry treasury in the autumn, and no prospect of revenue; for in these States "no crop no revenue" is still the rule. He borrowed three million rupees from the Government of India, and, with the help of his own Ministers and a little knot of Englishmen who for the last six months have been toiling like galley slaves, a relief organisation has been built up which would do no discredit to a British district. I have seen something, and heard more, of the good work that is being done in Marwar; and coming as I did from British territory, expecting to find confusion and inadequacy in the organisation, the results have astonished me. Even in the face of a cholera epidemic, happily of a mild kind, which has attacked most of the famine camps and is

raging in Jodhpur and in many of the villages, the machinery is going without any sign of a breakdown. To take the city first—the wonderful sand-swept city of the desert, whose stone houses from the height of the fortress look as if they had been peppered down anyhow, and might be so many chips that the centuries had knocked off from the rock-mounted fort and left sticking in the sand: here I have found poorhouses, orphanages, a cattle camp—with an inscription from Shakespeare over the door,—searching parties for bringing in the starving from the country round, and an institution for the relief of purdah women. Sir Pertab Singh, the indomitable, who has buckled down to famine work like the cheery old warrior that he is, took me to see this last institution, in the fortunes of which Lady Pertab has been much concerned. The high-caste women were found, as they are in so many places, starving quietly at home with their children, their husbands having gone off to look for work. They were taken to the Home, which is out on the hills a couple of miles away, and there I saw them grinding their corn and cooking their cakes like anybody

else. Even the purdah had fallen from their faces, and some of the women did not trouble to replace it—such is the force of famine. Sir Pertab Singh, Prime Minister, is a reassuring figure as he gallops about on his Arab pony; strong, straight, unconventional—a man whom they say the people will obey unquestioningly, even though his orders are, as they are to-day, that last week's rainfall which has filtered into the empty tank is on no account to be touched. The poorhouse—or one of the poorhouses—is established in the courtyard of an old palace of the Maharajah's. A thousand people were breakfasting when I went round the place—the Bhils in one line, the weavers in another, and the higher castes, preserving their selectness while they tried to put some flesh on their bones, in a third. The death-rate here was low, and the people seemed in fair condition and ready in many cases to be drafted off to relief work. In the old British Residency there is an orphanage, maintained by Rao Bahadur Sookdeo Pershad, the State Secretary, of which it can only be said that the children are fat. This is not the case with the cattle in the charitable refuge, where a lean and weary-eyed

SIR PERTAB

company were munching the stalks of a highly unnutritious-looking grass. A bullock laden with water went down in a heap in the street in front of me to-day, and farther on I passed a horse dying in the middle of the road. The wild birds and beasts, too, are starving in millions. Therefore the cattle should be thankful for their stalks, for the inscription about the quality of "charity" over the gate, and for the ingenious collecting-box which the Rao Bahadur has invented, and on the inside of which a cow is painted with the words "Thank you" in Persian, Hindustani, and English, coming out of its mouth.

JODHPUR, MARWAR, 21 *April.*

XII

MARWAR AND JAIPUR

At Pali, in the Marwar desert, I found a large tank in process of being deepened and a poor-house established in the Durbar stables. The camp where the famine labourers are housed is excellently arranged, with long lines of mud huts thatched with grass, each with its grind-stone, primitive cooking appliances, and store of thorns for fuel. The hut is supposed to hold about a dozen, and where the patriarchal family, usually a pretty extensive one, fails to fill it up, the family "co-opts" some fellow-villagers or adopts some of the orphans who are always plentiful on famine works. As a rule the head of the family makes the purchases for the group. The wages are sufficient to buy about a pound and a half of grain a day for each grown-up person, and they are eked out with bark and roots. At the best of times

the wants of the Marwaris are not excessive. A feature of the works is the daily payment of wages, a system which has the advantage of keeping the people out of the bunya's debt and checking any disposition to peculation on the part of subordinate officials. I was assured in Bombay that daily payments were impossible, owing to administrative difficulties, but here at Pali the system was in full swing—I believe it is adopted on all the works in the State,—and I am inclined to put down the very fair condition of the people on the works to the facts (1) that they know precisely what wages they are entitled to; (2) that they get their wages; and (3) that they enjoy the full purchasing power of their daily pay, which the famine workers on British territory, owing to their indebtedness to the bunya, often fail to do. At Pali, too, they deal very gently with the aged and infirm. At intervals along the top of the embankment which will be washed one day by the waters of the tank, sat lines of old people hammering away at the clods of earth with bits of wood about the size of a child's hoop-stick. Two thousand of the ancients of Marwar, together with the lame and the blind, were

beating out the clods on the morning of my visit. The sun beat fiercely on their heads, and the glare from the burning earth struck back upon their faces ; but the torrid perch was a bed of roses compared with the stone-heaps where the patriarchs of the Deccan are condemned to labour.

I mentioned in my last letter that cholera was raging in Jodhpur, and I have since heard that outbreaks have occurred in most of the famine camps. At Pali town—a place which gave its native name to the plague—there is a serious epidemic, but happily no fresh cases have appeared in the camp or poorhouse for some time back. At a tank work fifteen miles to the east, where nearly 30,000 wanderers had been collected, things have not gone so well, as a panic set in, and more than half the people scattered themselves over the desert, carrying the pestilence with them. The same thing on a smaller scale has happened at other camps, and it is easy to understand why the towns and villages, not in Marwar alone, but in other Rajputana States, are being desolated by the scourge. Cholera, indeed, is in the air. I travelled from Jodhpur with one of the

engineers of the railway. A telegram was put into his hand saying that a man with cholera had been taken out of the train that followed ours, and a few stations farther on another telegram was handed to him announcing the man's death. My fellow-passenger to Jaipur was a doctor knocked up by overwork, who had been fighting the cholera in the northern districts. An English officer on famine service in the deserts since November came in on his camel to Pali fit for nothing but a rest at home. I open the newspaper, and find that cholera has broken out at Godhra, and that a hundred bodies are lying unburied at the camp that I visited a fortnight ago. Brahma Nund, famine officer to the Marwar Durbar, who came with me in the train from Pali to Marwar junction, was visiting a camp a short time back when he saw a man fall. Then another fell, and another. Next day a hundred and ninety people were down with the cholera, most of the officials had fled, the camp was in panic, and the sweepers would not touch the bodies. Brahma Nund collected fresh workers around him, told the people that it was a holy service, and no defilement to see to the sick and

bury the dead, and in due time fairly beat the cholera out of the camp. A line from the book of Ramayan, he told me, was running in his head during the struggle; he wrote it for me in my notebook, and here it is—"Disadvantage, advantage, life, death, fame and infamy rest in the hands of God."

I am afraid there can no longer be any doubt that a calamity of the most appalling kind is beginning to break over India, and that hundreds of thousands of poor wretches who have been reduced by want and by the hardships and unnatural conditions of life in the famine camps will go down before the blast. The odds are too great against the handful of Englishmen who are fighting on the other side. Here in Rajputana there are twenty Staff Corps men and a few engineers and doctors, and besides them must be reckoned the Residents, the story of whose efforts to save the people would make a chapter in English history worth the reading, if it could only be written. Look at the map, and consider what chance this little band of Englishmen, backed by an occasional Brahma Nund, can have against the pestilence. Nor is the rest of India so vastly better off in

point of establishment. A thousand, or even five hundred, British officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, and another five hundred doctors might turn the scale. The existing service is not strong enough to grapple with famine, let alone cholera.

I must go back now for a moment to describe another part of the Marwar machinery of relief —I mean the collecting depôt. One of the difficulties the State has had to face is the recall of the multitude of Marwaris who have strayed into other districts. Many have come back by road, but immense numbers have been fetched by train, and Marwar Junction, where a collecting camp is established, is one of the principal depôts for the reception of these wanderers, who are fed up for a few days and then passed on to one of the famine camps. The camp proper has had to be dismantled because of the cholera, and I found four parties, each about a thousand strong and arranged in huge circles on an open stretch of sandy ground, their fires beginning to blaze in preparation for the evening meal. Here were all sorts and conditions of men—potters, oil extractors, camel breeders, beggars, thieves,

drummers, cultivators. Most of those I talked to were wanderers who had returned from Central India, leaving their cattle dead behind them, and often enough some member of the family as well. A woman who sat with her boy had left her husband and a girl of twelve at Indore, and two of her children had died since their return to their own land. There have been many deaths at the collecting house. The doctors tell me that the condition in which thousands of wanderers have come back is such as to make their final recovery impossible. They may do their work at the famine tanks and eat their rations like the rest, but their bodies cannot be properly nourished, and if they get back finally to their own villages it will only be to die.

Here in Jaipur State the famine is less severe than it is in Marwar, and in many districts there has been a fair supply of fodder. Moreover, there are appreciable stretches of country where irrigation works have enabled the people to hold out longer than they would otherwise have done. True, the water this year has been scanty, and now at the end of April the canals and tanks are giving out ; but there is no doubt

that the jealous care with which the scanty rainfall has been husbanded and utilised, has done much to add to the staying power of Jaipur. The good work done in this direction is due to the man who for thirty-three years has given the whole of his energies to the advancement of Jaipur. Under Colonel Jacob's direction more than a hundred and fifty irrigation works have been carried through, and this in a country without rivers, and presenting as hostile a face to schemes of watering as, I suppose, any district in India. The usual plan adopted has been to select the best spots for catching and storing the floods which come with the rains, and then, by means of canals, to lead the water to as many village tanks, or reservoirs, as possible. Besides replenishing the tanks, the wells for a long way round have the leakage from the tanks to draw upon, so that the water is thoroughly well spread. Irrigation direct from canal to field—the common fashion in India—is also used. The accounts of the Public Works Department show what a splendid investment irrigation has been for Jaipur. On an outlay of five and a quarter millions of rupees, there is an annual return of

more than 300,000 rupees, and although the chief expenditure on capital account took place in the eighties, the whole outlay since the beginning, in 1868, will be recovered in another three years. The benefit to the people themselves may be imagined by those who know what the value of water means in India. I am told that when Colonel Jacob goes about the country, the people of the unirrigated districts surround him as if he were the god of water, and beseech him to give them canals. Another incidental advantage of a progressive water policy is, that when famine comes, there are irrigation schemes in readiness for famine labour. An example is to be found close to the city, where a deep sandy nullah, along the bottom of which runs a sluggish stream, is being turned into a garden of broad terraces. The water is dammed and then lifted on to the terrace on each side the nullah; and almost within hail of the people who are digging and carrying the loads of sand for the unfinished terraces, there are limes and orange trees and roses, guavas, barley, oats and grass, and all sorts of vegetables. The genius of the nullah is a famous organiser of transport, Dhanpat

Rai, whose name will be familiar to officers who have been on service on the frontier and in the Soudan. Dhanpat is now in charge of the Imperial Service Transport Corps of Jaipur State, which he has turned to good use for famine purposes, and he is cultivating the nullah and organising the 7000 workers employed in it as a sort of amusement. The little finger of this entirely competent person is worth more than a famine code and leagues of red tape to the Jaipur Durbar. His huts are dug out and solidly thatched; his gangs of workers know exactly what is the daily task, and do it; his orphans, clad in surprising jackets of yellow, are governed by five orphan corporals; his ambulance waggons are well horsed; and his depôts for the collection of sick and starving are run with military precision.

I suppose it is natural that a small compact State more or less subject to the influence of public-spirited Englishmen within its borders, should give evidence of more individuality and flexibility in its conduct of a famine than a British province, which goes by rule and tradition, and is subject to what is known in India

as the secretariat. There is, of course, a reverse side to the picture, and I have heard of infamies being perpetrated by famine officials in native States which have made the fingers of British officers who discovered them itch for their sword-hilts. But without instituting hasty comparisons between British and native States, it is pleasant to record the touches of human character and human kindness that one meets with here. Nor are they rare. The sick children in the poorhouse which Colonel Pank, the medical officer, is supervising, were nursing with much solemnity the lions and tigers and peacocks of painted wood which the Colonel had given them. And the poorhouse hospital itself was no range of low-browed huts, destructive to the hat of the Englishman who enters them, but a series of lofty and well-ventilated sheds which, in their kind, did no discredit to the Mayo Hospital, in whose grounds they stand. The Maharajah is rich and generous—he has just presented Lord Curzon with a million rupees as an endowment for a permanent famine fund,—the Englishmen of Jaipur are public-spirited, and there is no secretariat; but, even so, the

painted lion and the orphan corporal are welcome. Then, again, if you ask how the people are faring at the hands of the revenue collector and the bunya, you are bound to admit that there is something to be said for the native State. In most of the Rajputana States the fixed assessment has, for good or evil, been introduced. But in Marwar, whose ingenious system of land revenue I shall return to later on, there is no talk about revenue in years of extreme scarcity. Then the bunya, though troublesome and dangerous enough, has nothing like the power that he enjoys in British territory. A bunya in Marwar was caught selling light weight the other day, and in the presence of a British officer he was hoisted on the back of a camel and beaten with a slipper through the famine camp. Here in Jaipur the Durbar has been selling grain against the bunyas since September, with the best of results for the people, though at a heavy loss to itself. Twenty-one Raj shops are opened in different parts of the town, and up to the 24th of April grain to the value of a million and a half rupees was sold. The police attempted to keep the women

and children from getting near the shops, till the Durbar found them out and whipped them. Then the bunyas went into the market where the Raj was buying and tried to corner it, and their ringleaders were discovered and whipped as well. The result of this combination of protection and free whipping is that the people of Jaipur are getting comparatively cheap bread. Here is a story which shows what manner of men the Jaipur cultivators are. It was told me by an Englishman who has just come back from a tour round the famine districts. The Englishman was trying to persuade the villagers in a remote part of the State to leave their homes, where they were starving, and go to the relief works. They replied, as they often do, that they would not abandon the old people, and that they had no money to buy food for the journey. The Englishman offered to give them money, and some of the people accepted it, and promised to go. One man, however, who had taken a rupee came back afterwards, and insisted on returning it, as he had three goats, and one of them, he explained, could be killed and eaten at each stage of the journey. Later on another

man came to the Englishman to return his money, as he could not give an absolute undertaking to leave his home until he heard from his brother, who had a half share in the house. Such honesty has a prehistoric flavour, but it matches the character of the peasantry, who prefer to stay at home and die quietly when the last grains are gone, rather than tear life up by the roots and go on the relief works.

JAIPUR, 1 *May*.

XIII.

THE PUNJAUB

"Now I have given the darkar [district] of Hissar," so ran a proclamation of Akbar Shah Badshah in 1568, "to the great, the fortunate, the obedient, the pearl of the sea of my kingdom, the star of my Government, the praised of the inhabitants of the sea and land, the apple of my kingdom's eye, my son Sultan Muhamed Salim Bahadur (may God grant him long life and greatness). My wisdom wishes that the hopes, like the fields of those thirsty people, may by the showers of liberality and kindness be made green and flourishing, and that the canal may in my time be renewed, and that other waters may be conducted into it, that thus it may endure for ages. For God has said, from water all things were made. Therefore I ordain that this jungle, in which subsistence is obtained with thirst, be converted

into a place of comfort, free from all evil." The edict went on to say that the canal was to be "excavated deeper and wider than formerly," and that "on both sides of the canal down to Hissar trees of every description, both for shade and blossom, be planted, so as to make it like the canal under the Tree in Paradise."

The pearl of the sea must have done his work faithfully, for the banks of his canal are shaded with all manner of trees up to and through Hissar, and there is water enough for a good belt of fields on each side, the crops of which were glistening in the sun as I rode along the bank this morning. The Oriental fervour of this strange old utterance seems nothing more than natural after a thousand miles of wilderness and the extermination of all agriculture. To see groups of people in the fields again, to see things growing, oxen standing in the shade, squares of land glistening under the film of water from the canal, and, climax of all, a big company of men and women threshing the yellow wheat, is a wonderful thing. But this "place of comfort, free from all evil," is, after all, a narrow strip running

through a great waste of wicked desert; and out in the desert, in which their fields have disappeared, the people of Hissar, in numbers that fluctuate from a hundred thousand to a hundred and sixty thousand, according to the work to be got elsewhere, are digging tanks and living in famine camps. Numbers of villages are absolutely deserted, and for more than six months past the worst famine within human memory has had its grip on Hissar.

The scarcity of food is worst in this southern corner of the Punjaub, a corner about as large as Yorkshire; but the fodder famine throughout the whole province has reached a point of such intensity that the Lieutenant Governor has just declared that, in spite of all the efforts of the local government and the Government of India, it is impossible to secure supplies for keeping life even in the indispensable plough cattle. Thanks to the supplies of fodder from the Chenab and other canals, the calamity has been put off for months, and it is very hard that this great province should have to look on now while its cattle are dying by hundreds of thousands, as they died last year in Rajputana and Gujerat. It becomes more and more

difficult to see how the cultivators of the stricken districts are to get back to work again, in the face of this measureless destruction of their cattle. Even the beasts on the great Government cattle farm, which covers an area of 60 square miles, are in a half-starved state, and it is lamentable to see them roaming about in their vain search for food. The question is forced upon one again whether some system of Government fodder-storage or the provision of local ensilage depôts ought not to be energetically taken in hand when once the Government has time to look round. It is rather surprising to find so little attention being paid to this matter. Again and again the peasantry have been stripped bare of their capital, and nothing has been done to provide against future calamities. India has an enormous Forest Department, and it ought surely to be able to take steps for keeping, say, 10 per cent. of its live stock from death by famine.

"But what about canals?" the reader who has studied irrigation will ask. "Is not the Punjaub the classic ground for irrigation?" The answer is that the situation would be simply desperate but for the magnificent

system of artificial watering begun by the old rulers of India, and continued, up to a point, by us. Let me deal with the matter more in detail. The total area of crops matured in the Punjaub during the year ending September, 1899, was 20,738,687 acres, and of this area 8,967,391 acres, giving a yield of 43 per cent. of the crops of the year, were cultivated by irrigation. The chief forms of irrigation are—(1) the canal which draws its water all the year round from one of the snow-fed rivers of the Himalayas, and spreads them over a great tract of country by a system of minor canals and ducts; (2) the inundation canal, fed by cuts in the river banks through which the waters find an exit in times of flood; and (3) the irrigation wells. The immense importance of the well in Indian agriculture will be seen from these two facts—that during the past ten years more than 16,000 new masonry wells have been sunk in the Punjaub, to say nothing of the simple pit or cutcha well, and that close on four million out of the nine million of irrigated acres were watered by the wells. The inundation canals, owing to want of flood-water, did badly, and a decrease of half a million acres

of watered lands since the previous year must be set down to their account.

As for the great and constant-flowing canals, whose shaded banks are the pleasantest refuges the plains can offer you in the hot weather, they have done so magnificently well that the failure to extend them faster is most unfortunate. Of their financial success I say nothing at the moment, except that they are by far the best investment that the Government of India has ever made. They have largely extended the cultivation of new crops such as rice and sugar, they have given India a permanent granary, and they have opened up huge tracts of desert country to cultivation, relieving the congested districts in the process. This is an old story, no doubt; but the man who comes back from a camel-ride through a once-cultivated desert by way of Sultan Salim's water of Paradise sees more in a canal than the "moral and material progress" Blue-books disclose to him at home.

Take the Chenab Canal, the latest big scheme which the Government of India has carried through, and consider its effect, direct and indirect, upon the local famine districts—

the rainless corner of Hissar and the half-dozen other districts of the Punjaub less severely hit by the food famine than Hissar, but still pretty badly touched. Now the Chenab has opened or is opening up four million acres of pure desert, it has given any quantity of employment to the distressed people during the famine, it looked as if it was going to save the cattle out of its supplies of fodder, and it will certainly give to the Punjaub a new productive colony of a quarter of a million or so of workers and their families, all of them carefully selected from the congested districts. That is an achievement of which the proudest Government can afford to be proud, and Colonel Ottley, the master mind of the Chenab, who has gone home to irrigate the minds of the young men at Cooper's Hill, will be glad to know that, in the opinion of a high official of the Government, "the Chenab has largely saved the situation in the Punjaub."

In face of all this, the excessive deliberation with which the Government sets about realising the rest of the approved canal schemes is scarcely edifying. The Jhelum project was fully authorised in 1888, but nobody seems

quite to know when it will be ready to hold water. Then, after the Jhelum, there is the Sind-Sagar project for spreading Indus waters over another enormous stretch of desert; and there are some enthusiasts who hold the belief that about 1920 there may be a chance for the Montgomery project—a scheme which might have been half put through by this time if the Government had allowed a company to carry out the work. Some addition is being made this year to the pittance which the Government annually devotes to irrigation, but the Punjaub presents an irresistible case for large and adequate treatment. A forward policy means, of course, more men and bigger establishments; but so, for that matter, does a famine. And for the rest, if the approved schemes are all finished in a dozen years instead of fifty, there will still be plenty of work for the engineering staff, even supposing that India is by that time surfeited with canals.

To come back to Hissar, I must confess that opinions gathered here and in other parts of the Punjaub are not very hopeful about any extensive scheme of irrigation being possible for this district, and in these matters one is

necessarily in the hands of the experts. But at the worst a large canal policy would give permanent openings to many people in this famine-haunted region, and abundance of work, at least for a generation, to emigrants during times of famine. The recent drop of numbers on the relief works from 160,000 to 110,000 is due, so I am told, to the people going off harvesting in the irrigated regions.

It is satisfactory to know that every stroke of famine labour is making in the direction of more water storage. In company with the Deputy Commissioner who is "running the famine," I visited two of the tanks which are being dug out for the future use of groups of villages. A large number of these tanks are being made, and it is work of which the people well know the value. There is no complaint whatever of skulking. The day's work for the gang is marked out, and it is generally done within the day. A leading principle of Major Dunlop-Smith's administration of the last famine was that the people should clearly understand what was expected of them; he found that the trouble taken in explanations was well repaid, and that the

TAHVANDI RANA : ON VILLAGE RELIEF.

results of famine labour compared very fairly with ordinary labour; and evidently the tradition sticks. The people on the works struck me as in good condition, and there was practically no sickness — the best test, I suppose, of good all-round administration. Hissar, however, has not been spared by the cholera, which is raging at this moment in many of the towns and villages. The famine camps had their worst time some months ago, and there was a terrible outbreak on some canal works, many miles away, to which eleven thousand of the Hissar people had been deported—so bad, indeed, that the whole camp had to be broken up and the people brought back. I went also to the village of Tahvandi Rana, five miles away, a cluster of mud hovels picturesquely heaped together on a mound in the desert, and deserted by all but the aged and infirm, who are receiving a weekly dole. These poor creatures were waiting for us outside the village, formed up in a group under a big sandbank. There were old men leaning on their staves, and women shaking with palsy, the usual collection of village decrepitude, and five blind. On the

other side of the road were the fresh applicants for relief, who told their cases. One of them was an old man who had lost two of his sons. He was keeping their wives and their three children and his old mother of ninety. He had no land, and his bullocks, from which he got a living, were dead. He and five more were put upon the list. Altogether in the village, which is a large one, there are thirty-one people on Government and twenty-nine on charitable relief.

I must turn now for one moment to the unpleasant business of criticism, a task that is lightened in the present instance by a frank confession of error and promise of repentance. In his report on the last famine Major Dunlop-Smith pointed out that the grain stores existing in the district gave evidence of unsuspected staying powers on the part of the people; but he also took pains to point out that of the sum of four hundred thousand and odd rupees owing for land revenue and other Government demands, it would be practically impossible to recover anything during the following harvest, which happened to be a bumper one. Other counsels, however, prevailed, and

the arrears were incontinently collected, almost before the people had time to look round. The very next year the famine comes again, and the people, who with a little nursing might have pulled themselves together for a struggle, are compelled to come on the works at once, and in 50 per cent. greater numbers. There could hardly be a more dramatic illustration of the tendency of our revenue arrangements to play into the hands of the famine demon. But, as I say, the Punjaub Government have publicly acknowledged their error and, I think it may be said, abjured it.

HISSAR, PUNJAUB.

XIV

THE COLLECTION OF LAND REVENUE

I HAVE come on a flying visit to Simla, where the head-quarters of the Government are established for the hot weather. There is no famine here, thank Heaven. On the ridges of the Himalayas you strike once more the impregnable rock of assured and adequate diet. Simla, in spite of its deceptive-looking Oriental bazaar, is not India, but Rotten Row, and Pall Mall, and Whitehall, hung up in the mountains of Sutherlandshire, and waited on by coloured servants in liveries. That it should be possible to rule India by telegraph from such a place is a thing that fills one with abiding astonishment. It is a triumph of political imagination. The famine itself is being "run" from Simla at this moment. The high officials have their hands on the wires that link together the Indian

wilderness from Hissar to Hyderabad, and the statistics of relief works and mortality, and the omens concerning the eagerly expected monsoon, are conned and tabulated within sight of the snows, and as likely as not with the hailstones beating a wild tattoo on the roofs of corrugated iron, which ripple between the government of India and the stars. By the courtesy of those who are concerned in this work of supervision, I am able to give some general information as to the course of the famine, and the steps that are to be taken so soon as the rains break.

When I arrived in Bombay I concluded too hastily that the extraordinary measures adopted for the collection of land revenue were due to the orders of the Government of India. As a matter of fact the Presidency Government was, and is, alone responsible. There is a further word or two to be said in regard to this very grave matter. The Bombay Government has put it forth that the collection is only to be pressed where the cultivator is able to pay, and that the man who cannot pay is to have the benefit of suspension. That is to say, he will start farming again after the famine with arrears

of taxation hanging over him, which may or may not be finally remitted. Now what is the plain English of this edict? There is, in the first place, no means of discriminating between the man who can pay and the man who cannot. I forget whether I have mentioned that Bombay has no system of land record, but so it is, and the actual ownership of the land is therefore absolutely unknown to the officials. What happens is, that the revenue notice is first of all served upon the occupier, and if, after certain kinds of pressure, he fails to pay, another notice is served on the money-lender of the village, who is pretty certain to be either the owner of the land, or the creditor of the ryot. "If the ryot cannot pay, let the money-lender pay for him," is the Bombay formula. The following passage from a report of an ex-collector of Poona as to the methods adopted during the famine of 1891–2, puts the matter in proper official form:—"The revenue," says the collector, "was paid up as soon as the milder forms of pressure began to be exercised. There could not, to my mind, be a clearer indication of the fact that the cultivating classes possess a reserve of resources not always

attributed to them. It may be that many not in debt before had to apply to the village money-lender, and that many already in debt had to involve themselves in heavier liabilities. But to raise money on loan necessitates the possession of some sort of credit, and practically the whole revenue demand was eventually paid up either from hoardings or from loans which the credit of the borrowers was good enough for them to obtain." The argument sounds rather cynical, and if it had come from the mouth of a seigneur in the days before the French Revolution, I suppose the historians and moralists would hardly have let it pass; but I have no doubt that the collector sincerely represented the views of his Government, and those views are no whit less firmly held to-day. Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that the revenue officials knew their men, and had at least a shrewd suspicion as to their resources, would it be possible to carry out a policy of selective pressure without risk of injustice? I have put this question to some of the highest revenue authorities in India, and their answer is that it would be impossible. The subordinate native official collects the tax, and he will

do what in him lies to please his superiors by getting in all the money he can squeeze from the cultivators. He will establish a reign of terror in the villages, and with examples of distraint before their eyes, the people will beg or borrow or do anything to raise the rupees for paying the tax, or for bribing the official to give them time.[1]

It should be understood that Bombay is the only Government in India, British or native, that is suffering from an attack of revenue-hunger at the present time. The native States are suspending and remitting over entire areas where the pinch of famine is most severe, and in the Punjaub and the Central Provinces suspensions by district have already been arranged on a large scale, and the cultivators know exactly where they stand. In four districts in the Central Provinces the entire revenue has been suspended, and in the other districts it has been lightened materially. There is no doubt, too, that the British provinces will ask the Government of India to sanction the conversion of suspensions into remission when the time arrives,

[1] This has since been verified by the disclosure of violent and oppressive measures of recovery adopted in Bombay during the worst rigours of the famine.

and that on a very large scale. As to Bombay I have my misgivings. The Government of the Presidency may be forced on occasion into partial and grudging suspension, but into remission never. The one good harvest that stood between the famine of 1897 and 1899 had to pay the famine revenue and the revenue for the current year, and when the money-lenders had taken their share, the cultivator had nothing left for a rainy or, rather, a rainless day. The results we know. No remissions were made in the famine of 1891–2, and only trifling suspensions, and for the ten years previous to the famine, which included seasons of scarcity in the Deccan, the account stood thus:—Collections, 98·40 per cent. of the demand; outstanding balances, 0·94; irrecoverable balances written off, 0·43; remissions, 0·23. Is it to be wondered at that the money-lender is entering into the ryot's lands, or that famine comes more swiftly on famine's heels than ever before?

There is another aspect of this painful business which can hardly have escaped the Englishman who gives a moment's thought to India. If there is something fatuous in

taking a farmer's last rupee with one hand, and offering him a job at stonebreaking with the other, or in making large loans of Government money for well-sinking and seed purchase to people whose resources have been drained dry by Government's revenue demands, can it be said that the part allotted to the charitable public is altogether satisfactory? Most of the funds subscribed in England and elsewhere will go, as I understand, in gifts of money for the purchase of cattle and seed-grain to farmers who cannot offer Government a good security for a loan. This may or may not be the best shape that such help can take, but my point is that there is a certain hardship in expecting the public to provide an indemnity, as it were, for Governments whose reckless collecting has plunged the people into ruin. The Bombay system of grabbing at every rupee that it can seize is, I am afraid, made easier by the knowledge that charity will come to the rescue after the famine is over. This, however, is by the way. As to the need for help, it was never so urgent as it is to-day. The time is drawing near for the people to leave the works and get back to their land and villages in readiness for the rain.

But how are they to maintain themselves and their labourers without funds or credit, and how are they going to plough without bullocks? Again, the people on the works are only the fringe of the distressed millions. In ninety native States, in Bombay, the Central Provinces, the Punjaub and Berar, some 90 millions of people are hit by the famine. What proportion have lost their cattle, eaten up their store of seed-grain, and worked through their credit with the money-lender, no one can say, but it is certain that a larger number of cultivators are simply broken to-day than ever were broken before in the recorded history of India. The single item of cattle lost is stupendous, and though here and there the ryots may make a push to prepare their lands by hand tillage—and I believe that part of the British fund is to be used in providing specimens of hand ploughs, harrows, and seed-drills,—it is clear that cultivation cannot be generally taken up again till the plough cattle are somehow replaced. Add to all this that the rains will find the land furrowed with sickness, and that cholera is already raging over an enormous area of the famine districts, and you have a rough idea

of the task that lies before the Government of India and the devoted band of Englishmen who are fighting the furies down on the burning plains. To meet these needs the Government has decided to devote half a million by way of loans for the purchase of cattle and seed-grain; and a further £380,000 from the funds contributed by people in India, England, the colonies, Germany, and America, is already allotted for the same purpose, only this latter sum will be distributed in the shape of gifts. The charitable fund may possibly be increased to half a million,[1] for the British colonies and dependencies are telegraphing over large sums, and in that case there will be a round million to be distributed over an area of 700,000 square miles, most of which has to be reclaimed from a state of desert. It is enough to indicate the need and the remedy to show how black the prospect is, and how overwhelming is the case for an English grant. To set the people on their feet again will cost many millions, and if the resources of India are unequal to the strain, the alternatives are obvious—the people will be

[1] According to the Viceroy's statement in October the fund actually reached about a million.

sent to their villages to face yet another famine, or the Government at home will have to come to the rescue. The theory held in certain quarters, that the money-lender will set things going again, is likely to prove a broken reed. In the first place, the usurers, in spite of their profits from the grain trade, are hard hit in their capacity of landowners and mortgagees; and, in the second place, the Government is trying to force them from the land in the Punjaub as a preliminary to stopping land alienation throughout India. Under these circumstances it seems unlikely that the bunya will come to the rescue. Of the wisdom and statesmanship of leaving the people to recover themselves by means of a further plunge into debt, I say nothing. Altogether the situation is one which England can hardly disregard.

SIMLA, *May*.

XV

IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

It is a far cry from Simla to the Central Provinces, whether you look at the thermometer or the distance to be travelled. For most of the way the railway skirts the western famine frontier. First there is a long stretch of Punjaub to be traversed, then you find yourself in the North-west Provinces, which have escaped the famine owing to a sufficient rainfall, touching at cities with Mutiny names, and passing close to the borders of Rajputana. And finally you cut across the barrier of the Central India States, in all of which the famine is more or less severe, and come out upon the region that has been described as the boss of the Indian shield, and which, topography apart, is the very equator for heat. When I left the train at Jubbulpur and stepped out into what ought to have been the cool of the evening, I had

skirted the greater part of the famine region, but the breadth of the Central Provinces still lay to the south, and beyond that again the enormous tract of Hyderabad and Berar.

The Central Provinces were constituted in 1861 by the union of the outlying dependency of the North-west Provinces (the Saugor-Nerbudda territories) with the estreated dominions of the Rajah of Nagpur. "These tracts," so a Government report informs you, "include the mass of jungle-covered hills which have given asylum to the aboriginal tribes in their retreat before the advancing tide of Hindoo immigration." Twenty-one thousand square miles are under the Forest Department, and in 1891 there were 18,000 square miles of large zamindari (landlord) estates, said to be in great part waste, and another 20,000 square miles lying uncultivated in private hands, most of it hilly and rocky ground, which the authorities say it would not pay to cultivate. Roughly, then, the Central Provinces include some of the richest land in India, with tracts of virgin soil that have only been opened up within the last thirty years—and also some of the poorest. It is emphatically a half-developed

territory, and for mixture of tribes I suppose it cannot be surpassed. The land system is described as forming the connecting link between the proprietary communities of the North-west Provinces and the landlord settlement of Bengal. The revenue settlement is not made with each individual cultivator as in Bombay and Madras, nor with entire village communities, as in the North-west and, nominally, in the Punjaub, but with landlords who were drawn from the class of revenue farmers, and in a moment—as it seems to some—of aberration forcibly endowed by the Government with the lands of the State. For the rest the tenants have quite recently been safeguarded in respect to their occupancy rights by a most stringent law. Their rents are fixed by the Government when the periodical revenue settlement is made with the landlords, concerning which, however, and the effect of the system of land assessment on the condition of the people, I must postpone comment till I have had time for pushing my inquiries further. As to the extent and acuteness of the famine, it may be gauged by the fact that out of a population of ten and three-quarter millions in the

districts affected, close upon a million and three-quarters are on Government relief, and it is expected that the number will be increased to two millions before the monsoon bursts. In Raipur, the great rice-growing district, 600,000, or 40 per cent. of the people, are on relief, and in Bilaspur, the neighbouring division, which I hope to visit, a quarter of a million. Happily the people have been spared a fodder famine, and there is food and to spare for all the beasts in the Government forests; but the rains were wholly insufficient to grow rice, and in the grain-growing districts the autumn and spring crops were very small. The scarcity of water is growing acute, and wells, tanks, and streams are drying up on every hand; but in the eastern district, from which I write, the land looks far less baked than in the rest of the famine districts, and I believe that the authorities hope for a sufficient supply for drinking purposes throughout the provinces.

It is impossible to speak too highly in praise of the relief work which has been carried on ever since the autumn. In the famine of 1897 the Government was too late in the field, and a heavy toll was paid before measures of relief

—could be organised; but the lesson has been well learned, and directly the failure of the autumn crops declared itself, a systematic campaign was organised by the Chief Commissioner, and pushed forward twenty-four hours ahead of every movement of the enemy. The campaign has no doubt been costly, and it has absorbed an army of organisers, but on the other hand it has kept the people from starvation, and when the monsoon bursts the two millions of agriculturists will be in good heart and trim for getting their farms in hand again. Till a week or so back, when the cholera drew ahead, the death-rate for the Central Provinces was normal, and if that is not a test of triumphant organisation, I do not know what is. The Government has opened village relief works and kitchens at the people's own doors; it has gone to the Gonds and Bhils, and other aboriginal tribes, and offered them work at grass-cutting and road-making in the forests, and wherever there was a sign of genuine distress, relief works on a larger scale have been opened. Not a district has been neglected, and out of all the scores of thousands who have come in across the borders, not a starving wanderer from the

Native States has been sent empty away. And with all this the rate of wages has been sufficient to keep the people in good condition; fining below the minimum is rare, and the penal minimum is, so far as I can gather, unknown. What has been the moral effect of this policy? Have the people flocked from their villages at the invitation of the Sirkar when they might have stayed at home? Are they skulking at their ease on the works, where the Government is feeding them? These are the questions which I have been putting to officials of all grades in the service, and seeking to answer for myself in the villages as well as on the works. I cannot pretend to give a conclusive reply, but I think that I can shed a little light on some very vexed questions which these recurrent famines are raising to a point of Imperial importance.

First as to the labour problem. The policy of the famine authorities has been to exact a fair task from the people, and to do this it was necessary to have competent supervision, and enough of it, to see that the camps were not so large as to endanger discipline, and to hit upon a means of payment that would give the

people a clear idea of the relation between work and wages. They began by paying their works superintendents double the salary paid in the last famine, and enough officers, engineers, and non-commissioned officers were imported to keep watch and ward over the whole gigantic system of relief that had of necessity to be built up on a basis of native officialdom. This, as I have said, was costly in the first instance, but then the famine in these parts has emphatically not been run on the cheap. Further, it was decided that not more than five thousand, or at the outside six thousand, people were to be employed at once on any one work—a provision that has kept the famine camps from degenerating into mobs. And, finally the payment of wages was to be made daily, and the daily task so marked out as to be comprehensible to a child. A system of moderate fining was introduced for cases of contumacy, but it was provided that no one should be fined twice in the same week until the attention of a superior officer had been called to the matter, so that inquiry should be made as to whether the fault lay with the workers, the supervision, or the

material. The result of all this patient and laborious contriving is that the great majority of the people are earning the maximum wages, and are in good heart and good condition, and that a vast addition in the shape of tanks, roads, and railway work has been made to the wealth of the provinces. So much for the work. That the policy will prove itself really costly in the long run I venture to doubt. Whether the relief has sapped the people's independence is a more difficult question to bring to the test. The view of those who are entitled to speak with the highest authority is that of two evils it was better that a certain number should be admitted to the works who were not absolutely destitute than that any risks should be run of reducing the really needy to a state of starvation by barbed-wire deterrents. They frankly admit that a certain percentage of people who might have eked out a living in their villages have come upon relief; but in regard to this class it is pointed out that when the famine is over their savings will be available for making a fresh start, and to this extent the drain on Government and charitable aid will be reduced. No one

can blind himself to the dangers that lurk in the erection of a system of out-relief on this colossal scale, but I cannot say that the officials are despondent as to the results, whilst the chief desire of the people themselves, who are employed at a distance from their homes, is to get back again as soon as may be. That is so, at any rate, in the case of the farmers. Till there is grain to feed them, it would be foolish to expect the labourers to be in any hurry to return. At the best of times their existence is a hard and precarious one.

In company with a member of the Civil Service I have been visiting some of the villages in the Hoshangabad division, and the evidence I have gathered, coupled with the testimony of the officers in charge of village districts, goes to show that the bulk of the people have elected to make a brave fight against the famine, surrendering only when there is no choice left to them. Riding out through the fields, you are struck at once by the amount of work that is going on in the way of ploughing, harrowing, and weeding, and in the villages there are plenty of signs

of life and animation. Out of half a million people in the division only 60,000 are on relief; the rest are living on the remains of a scanty harvest which they were able to reap this spring. But it is a hard and anxious business, a painful race against time and the rains, and the people's faces tell the story of what they have had to endure. They have eaten their seed grain, and for months they have been living on half or rather less than half rations, for which in many cases they have had to go into debt to the landlord. Their credit with the money-lender is exhausted, and the women's ornaments were sold or pledged in the famine of 1897. Yet with relief works within easy walking distance, whole villages are fighting it out together. One of them, a large village with 500 inhabitants, settled by the Rajputs after the famine of 1861, had sent only eleven of its people to the works. The next village was in much the same case, and at a third, a few miles farther on, where the tank was being deepened by famine labour, only a handful of people had gone on the works. Yet in this village all the tenants, except a couple of farmers, had

mortgaged their occupancy rights to the money-lender, reducing themselves in the process to the position of bond-slaves. The people are eking out their grain with such wild fruits, roots, and berries as the plains afford. If the fodder famine had spread to the Central Provinces they would be in far worse case. As it is, they are able to earn a few annas by hauling timber and grass from the forests and carting grain to the famine camps and villages. How far are these people typical of the rest who are facing the famine at home? According to three charge officers who have been looking after a population of some 80,000 in the same district, they are a fair sample, only, of course, the numbers who have gone in the works vary according to the degree of the failure of the crops, and, for the rest, some villages which have been disheartened by a long series of failures have gone almost *en masse*. One of these officers tells me, too, that in his district the people do not wait for the disappearance of the last handful of grain, but when no more than a month's allowance is left they hide it away in readiness for the rains, and the family, or some part of it, goes on

relief. Couple with this the fact that many of those on the works are actually saving a fraction of their wages against the time for the return to the village, and one gets a partial clue to the mystery of how the cultivators manage to exist between the closing of the works and the gathering in of the autumn harvest. In Rajputana I found the famine workers were putting aside a pinch from their rations for the same purpose, and so strong is the instinct to make provision for the blessed days when the green shoots will be showing above the soil, that I am assured the people will put up with any privations so long as they can insure themselves against the journey home and the period of waiting for their crops. The two big parties of Marwars that I met trekking back with bullocks and carts to their own land must have provided for the journey by stinting themselves on the famine camps. These Indian cultivators are an amazing folk, patient, resourceful, and thrifty beyond belief. And the authorities have surely done better in making it possible for them to get back home in good heart and fair trim than if they had broken them

in spirit and health by a course of penal diet.

Last Sunday I rode out ten miles from Harda towards the spurs of the Satpuras, whose western shoulders I had seen from Khandesh. The vast stretch of jungle-covered mountains, which are the home of the Ghonds and Koorkoos and other aboriginals, were hidden by the grey haze in which the country was set to boil on that particular day. Was it a sign, we wondered, that the rains were coming? For a week or so before the monsoon bursts there comes a sort of lull, with a thundery feeling in the air, which the people call "the great silence." The soothsayers declare that the rains will come early this year, but at Simla the meteorologists give them another three weeks. Some of the villagers we passed in the fields, or driving their bullock-waggons along the ruts which pass for a road, thought the rains were coming within a week or ten days. Their soothsayers predict another two years of bad fortune for India. The rains are not to fail, certainly; but the harvests will be poor—so poor that only the commonest sort of grains should be sown.

My guide was to hold a conference with the famine officials about the storing of grain in the hill villages before the rains make the roads impassable, and close to the village where he was to meet them a whole posse of natives were eating their tiffin under a grove of mangoes. Some of them had devised a dish which was new to my companion, with all his knowledge of the aboriginals. It was not the chiroda plant, nor the young leaves of the pipal tree, nor the achar fruit, nor the temru, nor any one of the innumerable roots and berries of the jungle which the Ghonds and Bhils devour, but the big stones of the mango, which were being roasted for the sake of the kernel, and an excellent dish they are said to make. The tribes have deserted their villages and flocked to the works which the Government has set up in the forests. People tell me that you see no more signs of starvation in the hills than you do in the plains, and I can testify that I have seen no traces of famine in Jubbulpur, Hoshangabad, Tamarni, or Harda, except an occasional wanderer from the Native States across the Nerbudda, and once or twice an emaciated infant. To have solved this problem, and to

have got a quantity of good honest work from the tribes in return, is a splendid achievement. The Government, too, is resolved that no risks shall be run when the monsoon bursts, and for the space of five or six hours on that sweltering Sunday, for the larger part of which, I fear, I slept, my companion was hammering out the details for the transport, storing, and distribution of a three months' stock of grain for the hill tribes, scattered over twenty square miles. And within a fortnight the thing will be done, too.

Alas! the cholera cannot be kept at bay, even in this district, for, feed the people as you may, there is no guaranteeing the purity of the water. I had come in early in the morning to the head-quarters of a district in the Western Division, and I called at the office of the engineer, who was looking after the district works, which give employment to some fifty thousand people. There was bad news. "We've kept the cholera at arm's length so far," said the engineer, "but it has broken out at a camp down the line, and ten cases were reported yesterday. The civil surgeon is going off by the next train, and I hope we shall be able to take it in time." We went down to the station,

the engineer armed with a big tin of permanganate for the wells, and there we found the civil surgeon waiting for his train, and likely to wait for another couple of hours—for such are the ways of the Indian lines,—with the certain prospect of missing the mail at the junction, and spending a dozen hours on a journey of less than a hundred miles. "We're used to this sort of thing," the civil surgeon explained; "time doesn't count in India." I took the night train in pursuit, having spent the afternoon at a famine camp on the Nerbudda, where some railway work was in progress, and early next morning I caught him up at the dak bungalow at Tamarni. Here, too, was the district famine superintendent, an officer of the Indian Staff Corps, worn, but full of "go." He had got a telegram at another famine camp two nights before, had ridden off at once without waiting for servants or stores, caught a goods train, and spent the whole of the previous day in separating the infected gangs from the others, douching fifteen hundred people with permanganate, seeing to the wells, and setting things straight at the hospital sheds. Up to four in the afternoon, when his stores came up, his rations

had consisted of a tin of sardines. On the whole it looked as if the measures adopted would stamp the cholera out. The civil surgeon and I jolted out five miles in an ox-waggon to the scene of action, the superintendent riding on ahead. Close to the hospital we found him driving bamboos into the ground, and getting ready the framework of another shed, for the hospital was overcrowded, and the coolies put on to the work had fled. Inside the two hospital sheds of wattle and mud, were a score or so of patients, with their women folk about them. Mothers were hanging over their children, brushing away the flies and moistening their lips, and in one corner of the shed stood a woman whose husband lay sick unto death, fanning him with her crimson sari. It was hot inside—anything from 105 to 110 degrees—the sun came streaming in through the cracks in the roof of matting, and the people were inconveniently crowded. But for all that there was an air of cheerfulness and confidence about the sufferers and their nurses; for most of the patients were making a good fight of it, death was in no hurry to empty the sheds, and, above all, the people who had been struck down were

well fed and in good condition. Truly the difference between cholera here and in Khandesh was immeasurable. A couple of miles further on we came to the famine workers taking their midday rest under the trees, which are plentiful in these parts, and well covered with fresh green leaves. Here it appeared that the cholera was not yet beaten out. Under a great mango tree was a group of men and women enjoying their siesta, with a fringe of children amusing themselves in the subdued fashion that seems common to the youth of India and Germany, and on the outside of the group, nervously watched by a couple of orderlies in scarlet scarves, lay a woman with sunken eyes and pinched features, who looked as if she had been ill for weeks. They got her on to a dhulie, and her two boys, with tears running down their cheeks, knelt on the ground and rubbed her legs to ease the cramp. The officer gave her a drink from his flask, and then, when the bearers were ready, the two boys pulled themselves together, hoisted the cooking vessels, water-pots, and the rest of the family belongings on their heads, and the sorrowful procession moved off towards the

hospital. I wondered how the people would take it; but they made no sign, and a few minutes afterwards a hundred smiling faces were looking on whilst the civil surgeon made the children scramble for pice and biscuits. For the space of half an hour you could not have wished to see a merrier party. Then came a messenger with word of another case under the mango trees a quarter of a mile off—a girl this time,—already cold and pulseless, but collected and undismayed. Later in the day there was a third seizure, the thirteenth since the night before; but from what I have heard since, I believe that this was the high-water mark of the epidemic, and that the disease has now begun to abate. The worst of it is, that it has crept into the villages around, and begun to make its way to the neighbouring camps. Every day that sees the pools in the rivers sinking, and the well-water growing muddier, and the mangoes ripening on the branches, is a day on the side of the cholera. Worst of all, when the monsoon breaks next month—for every one assumes that there will be no failure this year—the first swirl of the waters will carry death in every direction; and where the

famine administration has been run on hard and grudging lines, and the people are weakened and disheartened, the pestilence will have things its own way. Down here in the Central Provinces the relief has been organised with such grasp and thoroughness and the whole famine service is drilled to such a point of efficiency, that the prospect may be faced with something like composure. In the Raipur district matters are worse, the cholera having declared itself in forty-five camps; but the numbers attacked are only a tithe of those in the Bombay Presidency, and as the people have confidence in the officials, and all the camps are of manageable dimensions, there is no panic.

There is a serious flaw in the general famine organisation on which I must say a word before closing this letter. Here in the Central Provinces, any quantity of Government fodder, cut and uncut, is going begging, whilst away in the Punjaub and Rajputana and Gujerat, the last of the beasts are dying of hunger. The fact is that there is no fodder famine if you take India as a whole, any more than there is a grain famine.. But whereas the Government is paying the people to get rice

from Bengal and Burmah and grain from the North-west Provinces and the Punjaub, and the grain dealers and the railways are finding it worth their while to bring the food to the place where it is wanted, no such organisation, with the exception of a handful of cattle camps, exists for keeping the cattle alive. The fault lies partly with the Government, who began by demanding an absurdly high price for the fodder, partly with the railway companies, which either will not, or cannot, supply the rolling stock, and in any case find the transport of grain more profitable than that of pressed fodder. Between the two the mischief has been done. A spurt has lately been given to the Bombay demand by a big reduction of price, but the railway companies refuse to provide anything like enough trucks; and I suppose that is why the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjaub has given up all hope of bringing fodder into his province as a bad job. And yet the Forest Officer at Hoshangabad tells me that he is advertising his fodder in seven newspapers, and that the slackness of demand is such that the grass-cutting operations, carried on by famine labour, are being stopped. The

Forest Department has a pretty long queue of sins waiting at its door for the day of reckoning, and so have the Indian railway companies, and the two of them may now apportion the responsibility as best they may for the catastrophe which has robbed India of her cattle. So far as the Government of India and the provincial governments are concerned, their position is one of confessed helplessness. Surely it would have been better to spend a little money and energy in saving the cattle, even at the risk of annoying the railway companies, than to fall back on loans for buying fresh cattle, if indeed they are anywhere to be got.

HARDA, CENTRAL PROVINCES, 22 *May*.

XVI

THE PENAL WAGE AGAIN

PASSING through Bombay on my way to Gujerat, where I am anxious to see how the fight with the cholera is going, I find a long pronouncement in the papers from the Government of the Presidency in answer to my remarks on their famine administration. I am sorry that it makes no mention of their revenue proceedings. The document deals chiefly with the penal minimum, and I fancy it is addressed to Simla rather than to the public. If I add that it is in the nature of an apology for a line of action to be dropped, rather than a defence of a policy to be persisted in, I may appear to be in conflict with the wording of the document, which seems to threaten the continuance of a line of administration which I have already said is tantamount to introducing starvation into the famine relief works. My information,

however, warrants me in saying that this unhappy policy has already been checked. In Gujerat no more will be heard of the penal minimum, and I believe that measures are being quietly taken to suppress its abuse throughout the Presidency. In this work the Government of India is, I have reason to believe, taking a sympathetic interest. This being so, there seems no occasion to enter at any length into a controversy which has been already decided in principle, but, if only in courtesy to a Government which has given me every possible facility in my inquiries, and from many of whose officials I have received great personal kindness, I must try to meet the chief points of their reply.

And first let me say, as there seems to be some doubt on the matter, that there has been no difficulty on my part, nor, I hope, on that of my readers, in following the line of reasoning of which the penal minimum is the outcome. But in case there has been any misunderstanding on this score, I give the words of Mr. Monteath, the Chief Secretary of the Government, contained in the memorandum. After describing the condition of affairs at a camp in

Khandesh, where 37,000 people, supposed to be employed at stone-breaking, were living contentedly on the code minimum, and doing next to no work—at which camp he observes that the penal minimum was first introduced, —he continues :—

"It has never been considered a matter of primary importance to make famine labour productive. But it is essential, not only in the interests of the general community who have to supply the funds, but for the prevention of widespread demoralisation, that there should be a test of the need of relief, and the only effective test that has ever been suggested with regard to the able-bodied is the exaction of a reasonable amount of labour in return for the payment made. It is clear in the circumstances above mentioned, that the attempt to apply the test was frustrated either because the people dealt with had other resources, or because the Code minimum, which they could get without any substantial work, was found to be sufficient to maintain them without discomfort. In either case the relief works were converted into charity camps, and in the former case charity was given at the public expense to persons who were not in need of it."

This is a side of the problem which must, of course, be kept in mind from the first by any famine administration, and I do not wish to underestimate its difficulty. What I suggest,

however, once again is that there are other and, I think, better means of getting work out of people than a system of fines, the bearing of which, as likely as not, the culprits entirely fail to comprehend. I found, for instance, in the Punjaub and the Central Provinces, and in some of the Native States, that the people were working cheerfully and steadily and doing a fair day's work for a wage which, if fair under the circumstances, was nothing to boast of; that fining was hardly ever resorted to, and fining down to the penal minimum unknown. And on inquiries I invariably found that this result was due to two causes—rigorous supervision over subordinate officials and patient explanation and demonstration to the workers of the task required of them. The people, one must remember, are unused to working at stone-breaking and earth-carrying, or to carrying on organised labour in great bodies, and they want to be cheered and encouraged and not worked like machines. And the scratch collection of clerks and schoolmasters, postmen, policemen, and Heaven knows whom, who are appointed to hold sway over them are just as unused to the business of control, and they

want to be trained and encouraged. Set the two together, with an inadequate supply of effective officers at the top, and you will find every one down on the minimum. I did not see the camp at which 37,000 people were "supposed to be engaged in metal-breaking," but I heard of and saw other camps in the district where the organisation was, let us say, not in the same category with that of the Punjaub and the Central Provinces. This may have been inevitable. If so, I contend that the people should have had the benefit of the doubt, and that defects of organisation ought not to have been visited on their heads. One danger of the penal minimum is that administrators may adopt it in the hope that it will supply them with a cheap and automatic substitute for a well-considered organisation.

I observe that the memorandum says nothing of the efficacy of the penal wage either as a test of need or an incentive to hard work, but a long resolution of the Governor in Council, headed "Effect of the penal wage on relief workers," contains the following remarks:—

"These reports [referring presumably to the reports of district officers] do not afford sufficient grounds for a definite conclusion as to the effect of the reduction of the minimum wage in excluding from the works persons not really in need of relief, the ascertainment of which was the main object Government had in view. It can scarcely be doubted that the measure has had some result in this direction, but in Sholapur only have the local officers formed a decided opinion on the point, and the figures as given in a tabular statement do not seem to support it. If the estimate of the district medical officer in Khandesh—which, however, is not accepted by the collector—is at all approximate to the truth, there is an enormous number of people on the works in that district who prefer the penal wage without substantial work to a higher wage on condition of honest work."

This is really not conclusive, nor are matters mended by the omission to note the effect of the penal minimum on the work done. A Bombay newspaper assumes that it has had the effect of keeping a million people off the works, and the Government may of course pronounce an opinion later on. But for the moment the efficacy of the "test" remains a mere hypothesis. The Governor in Council, however, is explicit on one important point.

I mean the physical condition of the people in receipt of the minimum. "All the officers," he says, "who have reported regarding works on which the penal wage has been given are agreed that there has been no deterioration in physical condition, although a different opinion seems to have been expressed by some subordinate officers." I do not know if this is to be taken in the sense that medical officers have reported on all the works in question. In view of what I myself have seen, of the reports which have been shown me, of the official opinions openly expressed, and, above all, of the enormous death-rate at the camps where the penal minimum has become the prevailing standard, I can hardly suppose it to be so. In any case, it is curious if the penal minimum to-day is working out so differently from the 1-lb. ration in the great famine of 1877. I described that ration in one of my letters as rather more generous than the one under discussion, and I am confirmed in this view by what I have learned since. The truth is that the system of weekly payments adopted in violation of the Code places the people so completely under the thumb of the grain trader

that the money equivalent of 18 ounces a day is no warrant that 18 ounces can be purchased. Mr. Monteath will, I think, find on inquiry that the penal minimum works out in practice more severely by a good deal than it does on paper—more severely, I submit, than the 1-lb. ration adopted by Madras and Bombay in 1877 at the suggestion of Sir R. Temple. The memorandum states that "the authority for the statement that a reduced ration on a rather more generous scale was held accountable for the epidemics which swept off multitudes of famine workers in previous famines is not known." I am surprised at this announcement, because Bombay was closely concerned in this very controversy only 23 years ago, and Mr. Monteath will find that the officials defended the ration against all assaults precisely as it is alleged that they are doing now. But the Sanitary Commissioner and many other authorities denounced the wage from the first as utterly inadequate; and if Mr. Monteath will turn to Mr. Digby's book on the Indian famine, which gives a long account of the painful controversy, he will find that the enormous mortality is

attributed in great part to the 1-lb. ration. It is true that the sickness which followed the famine is dealt with by way of forecast, but I could quote columns from Mr. Digby's chapters in proof of the contention that the ration was the cause of sickness and death in the famine camps throughout the stricken area.

I think I have dealt with the more important points in Mr. Monteath's reply; but, as I say, the penal minimum is, I believe, practically dead, and a painful chapter in the history of the famine, the full meaning of which will never be known, is closed.

BOMBAY, 24 *May*.

XVII

GUJERAT IN MAY

When I was here a few weeks ago things seemed to be about as bad as bad could be; but all that was hideous and heartrending in the condition of the people has been intensified in the weeks that have passed. Cholera has come, the last of the few remaining cattle are dying, and under this burning sky, which shows no signs of the expected rains, the hearts of the people are failing them for fear. They have fought against death a long and unavailing fight, enduring sufferings that no Western race could bear; now they sit with bowed heads awaiting death. They have no hope to buoy them up, poor wretches. The skies are as brass; but supposing the rains were to fall to-morrow, how are the fields to be ploughed and sown without bullocks or seed, and where is

the food to come from to keep life in cultivator and labourer, and how are the children to live when the strength of the mothers is spent and the cow that used to give the "baba" milk is dead?

An impression seems to exist at home that directly the monsoon breaks a transformation scene is to take place, Government and philanthropy between them supplying all that is wanted to set the life of the fields in motion once more. I wish I could see any traces of such a thing here. In Broach—the richest and most heavily assessed district in Bombay Presidency—there is no evidence whatever of the approach of this happy change, and two incidents that have come under my notice point quite the other way. A practical effort was lately made by the Commissioner to keep the remnant of the plough cattle from death. A large grant was secured from the Famine Fund for supplying fodder at a low price—two rupees per 1000 lbs.—and arrangements were made for bringing up quantities from the Central Provinces, where, as I wrote last week, tens of thousands of tons are waiting for customers. Here was good tidings. The people came to

the town in crowds when the first consignment arrived, and their gratitude for this Heaven-sent respite for their dying beasts was touching to see. "Tell the Englishmen," said a ryot, "that all our cattle would have died if it hadn't been for them." But, alas, for the sequel! The railway companies, after the first few hundred tons were carried, turned their attention elsewhere. Remonstrances, petitions were in vain. The Government of India were appealed to, but they declared that they could do nothing. The railway remained deaf and obdurate. And so it has come about that the last hope of saving the beasts has had to be abandoned. "Give us fodder, give us fodder," was the burden of the despairing chorus that I heard in the villages yesterday. "We can manage for ourselves. We live on half our usual food, and it is poor, coarse stuff—rice from Burmah and jowar, instead of cadgeree and ghi; but help us to keep our cattle alive. We work where we can find work, and we are hungry. But if our cattle have no food, what use are our carts, and how shall we plough our fields?" It seemed cold comfort to tell these men that England will help—for what good will the help be later

on when the beasts are all dead?—but it was the best that I could offer them.

The second incident is of the same order, but this time it is the Government grant for buying cattle that has missed fire. A large order—large in actual numbers, but small in relation to the need—was given for bullocks to the cattle owners in Bhopal State, where cattle happened to be plentiful. The cattle were to be delivered at thirty rupees a head, and the authorities waited anxiously for their arrival. They are still waiting, and if in the course of weeks the cattle should arrive they will probably be too late. In any case, if there is no fodder in Broach they may just as well stay in Bhopal. I asked an Englishman, who has had business relations with Gujerat for nearly forty years, whether this deadlock was, in his opinion, avoidable. His verdict is that with energy and organisation the pressure could be overcome. But these are qualities that appear to be lacking in Indian railway management.

The physical condition of the people is steadily deteriorating, and the death-rate has gone up again in the past month. The Gujeratis are accustomed, as a rule, to plenty

of food—as plenty is understood in India—and they are unused to working during the heat of the day. The coarse and scanty rations, and the hard work of the famine camps, have fairly knocked them to pieces. It is, perhaps, a question whether the most generous treatment permitted by the famine code would have kept the Gujeratis in anything approaching to fair condition. Here, in Broach, where for some weeks the harshest treatment that I have seen in India was meted out, the state of the people beggars description. The "deterrent" element, on which the Bombay Government lay such stress, has had full play with a vengeance, but when the history of the famine comes to be summed up, I doubt if the result will be paraded as a success. The net effect of it on the works has been semi-starvation, sickness, and an appalling death-rate, and in the villages, starvation on a wholesale scale amongst the people who were "deterred," by the harshness of the tests, from going upon the works. There is a point at which relief becomes a greater evil than misery and privation, and to the mind of the Gujerati this point was reached when the wages on the works were cut down to the

skeleton standard. It is too late to repair the damage, now that the test has shown the people to be really and truly famine-stricken, and the buried hoards of grain and ornaments to be figments of the Secretariat's imagination. The rules have, indeed, been relaxed, but the people have lost confidence, and multitudes have been reduced to that awful state in which the body wastes and shrivels, no matter how much food is put into the stomach. The finest wheat and the best champagne would be useless now. And on top of all this a raging visitation of cholera is sweeping the country. Of this final catastrophe I can do no more than give you a colourless sketch. The kites and jackals are gorging themselves, and the air is thick with the stench of the dead, who are dying faster than they can be burned or buried. Every one of the works in the districts of Ahmedabad, Broach, Kaira, and Panch Mahals has been attacked. In Kathiawar it has been almost as bad. The cholera is of the most virulent kind, and the first instinct of the people has been to fly from the camps, in the hope of reaching their homes alive. It has been a race between cholera and starvation, a grand

hunt of death with scores of thousands of the refugees at the famine camps for quarry. The panic is estimated to have driven about half the people from the works in the Ahmedabad district, and I suppose that something like a hundred thousand souls have joined in the flight in Gujerat alone. The number of the dead is unknown, but it must be reckoned by scores of thousands. In some instances the native officials ran off when the cholera came, leaving the sick to die without medicine or help. At Godhra a handful of Englishmen, including the collector and the medical officer, had to collect and burn nearly a thousand bodies with their own hands. Dr. Klopsch, of the *American Christian Herald*, who is over here distributing the fund which his readers have contributed, was at Dohad, forty miles further west, just after the breaking up of the works, and he tells me that he could not free himself from the stench of the dead for a couple of days. He was in Russia during the recent famine, and, in his opinion, the stress of suffering in Gujerat, leaving the cholera out of account, is worse than anything he saw there. Happily the panic has left some camps

untouched. But the flight has been general enough to scatter the cholera broadcast through towns and villages, and to throw the relief machinery out of gear. Baroda has fared better, but in Rajputana the havoc has been something frightful, the recorded deaths from cholera amounting in places to nearly 5 per cent. of the population, and 10 per cent. in some of the Bhil districts. The works in Tonk, Udaipur, Sirohi, Marwar, and Ajmere were nearly dislocated, Udaipur faring worst. Colonel Adams, Administrative Medical Officer in Rajputana, is amongst the victims.

Now that the deluge has come the Government is taking measures. Additional officers, recruited from all parts of India, are being poured into Gujerat, and the Commissioner, Mr. Lely, who is looked up to by the people as their father and protector, has been granted something like a free hand. The new policy is to start works close to the villages, so that the refugees on their arrival shall find help within reach, and every nerve is being strained to get the organisation set on foot while there is a chance of saving life. It is too late to look for the equipment of anything approaching an

adequate medical and ambulance service. The people have died, and are still dying, like sheep, and a regiment of doctors and nurses would be too small to render much assistance. It is sickening and horrible to the last degree, but there is the fact. Indian fellow-subjects of ours, members of some of the grandest races in the world, are doomed to die as the beasts that perish, and the British Empire, for all its might and glory, is unequal to the task of sending them succour in their extremity. I sounded a warning note when I wrote to you early in April from Khandesh, where the cholera, which was beginning then, is still raging. It seemed to me at that time that a general visitation would find the authorities wholly unready. That cholera would come was regarded as a thing inevitable, and it was obvious that the Government was directly responsible for the collection of masses of people who, in their reduced condition, offered an easy prey to any epidemic, and especially to an epidemic arising from bad water. No effort or sacrifice should have been too great to give the people the necessary protection. I pointed out, however, that the medical service

was deficient even for the normal work of the famine camps and poorhouses. The "hospital assistants" and "compounders" were often, as I was later on to discover, unequal to their work, and sometimes scandalously incompetent. And besides all this, there was the ominous fact that a large percentage of the people were being granted an allowance which was neither more nor less than a refined form of starvation. The very worst that could happen has happened, and I cannot think that this ghastly chapter is one that the British people can look upon without misgivings mixed with their grief. They were told that the resources of India were equal to the strain, and they must know by now that this was not the case. A little more frankness, a little more forethought and contriving, a little more energy in preparing for the enemy, and the worst horrors of this frightful business might have been averted. There are plenty of doctors in England, and if there was no time to get them out, an ambulance corps might have been got together from the regiments in India for cholera service. Half a dozen cheery, competent soldiers in every camp would have made all the difference

between order and panic. Soldiers were told off for famine duty in the Central Provinces, and I heard excellent reports of their work. But nothing was prepared for beforehand. The Government of Bombay sat with folded hands, hoping for the best, but knowing that the worst must come. They were too late in opening the relief works in many parts of Gujerat and Khandesh, too late in realising that their "deterrent" policy was merely subsidising death.

BROACH, GUJERAT, 26 *May*.

XVIII

FAMINE ORGANISATION IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

I SENT you a rough sketch from Harda of the lines on which relief work in the Central Provinces is being carried out. My inquiry was interrupted by my hurried visit to Gujerat, and I hardly did justice to what is really a masterpiece of relief organisation. Bilaspur, where I have been renewing my studies, is in the far east of the Central Provinces, just to the westward of the meeting-place of the east and west monsoons. The district is hard hit, and more than a quarter of a million of the people are on relief. For the benefit of the reader, who may chance to be wearied by accounts of mere machinery, let me say a word before I begin. I can imagine people at home saying to themselves that the famine must be pretty well over by now, and declining to trouble themselves

further about the details of an organisation whose purpose has been served. My own view is that the famine is far from being over, and that there will be a call for further help for a long time to come, no matter how well the monsoon turns out. The famine affects an area equal to seven-ninths of the whole of British India, and a population more than twice that of the United Kingdom; the destruction of cattle is without precedent, and millions, who have held back from claiming relief, are destitute and without means of making a fresh start. Quantities of land will therefore be thrown out of cultivation, and employment in the fields, and in the industries that depend on agriculture, will be seriously contracted. The famine machinery, then, if my estimate is correct, is by no means ready to be packed up and put away.

And there is a graver question behind—I mean the doom of recurrent famines that seems to have been pronounced against India. I say "seems," but the sentence is ringing in the ears of all who have ears to hear. Even the *Pioneer*, which stands for what is optimist in the official mind, declares that famines must

be regarded as a recurrent evil, and that, as such, provision must be made to meet them. Remember that these famines, with only a year between them, have set their teeth in the land, that the people, who were incredibly poor in 1896, are poorer now than the beasts in the jungle, and it will be seen that, even with the kindliest of monsoons, a quick recovery is not to be hoped for. In many districts it will take a generation to get over the shock and loss of this year of horror, and we can hardly hope that the monsoons, which have been bewitched of late, will fall back into their old regular ways for the whole period of this perilous convalescence. If the famine camp, in one shape or another, is to become a standing institution, as I fear it must be for a time, we shall have to scrutinise it well, and see to it that the alternative life for ryot and labourer and village craftsman is made supportable, at the same time that we exorcise the famine demon from the body of our laws and administration.

One of the wisest things about the Central Provinces administration, as I have already hinted, is the stress that has been laid on village works. In this division alone something like

a thousand village tanks have been dug, deepened, or repaired, a job that has given employment to nearly half the able-bodied people on relief. See what this means. The people have been left at peace in their own homes, free to keep an eye on their fields and cattle, and to look after the old folks and the children, and ready to rush to the land directly the rains begin; and they have been employed at a kind of work which they all appreciate, because they know its inestimable value. I can testify to the good heart and trim of the people on these village works, both in the north and east of the Central Provinces, and it is wonderful to see the swiftness and intelligence with which they map out the work and the ease with which the whole thing is organised and kept going. The village headman, or the accountant, is generally in charge, and there is an occasional visit from the "circle" officer. It is the nearest possible approach to a system of automatic relief work, and it has been an unqualified success.

I have been knocking about in parts remote from the railway, riding through jungle and over rice and grain fields—that were—taking

stock, so far as I could, of the state of things in the villages, and meeting the people at camp in the evenings; and, notwithstanding that the famine is over everything, I have seen no traces of starvation. The worst sights that meet the eye are the evidences of the famine of 1897—houses deserted and falling to pieces, and lands which the jungle has annexed since the cultivators died or fled away in despair. Whole districts in these Provinces were desolated by that famine, and when you strike its trail you are reminded that the task of relief and succour is not alone humanitarian, but is dictated and enforced by cogent considerations of self-interest. For the jungle pays no revenue, and a course of famines unalleviated would send us packing out of India. This by the way. The pleasant thing to reflect upon is that the big brown bunds of the village reservoirs will be standing after the famine has passed away, the reserve of water will be greater than ever before, and, seeing that the new tanks are to be utilised for flooding the neighbouring fields, the area of irrigation will be greatly increased—in Bilaspur doubled. If the larger schemes for catching the water at the foot of the hills and linking

village tanks with the main reservoirs by means of a canal, had been ready in time, even more would have been done.

Another feature of Central Provinces administration is the village "kitchen"—a simple affair of a pot and a couple of stones under a tree, with a store of dal and rice and a Brahmin or some other high-caste person for cook. In two thousand kitchens the pot boils every day, and another five hundred are to be in readiness by the rains. The kitchen makes it possible to give gratuitous relief with a less grudging hand than when the dole is paid in rice, and for children and the aged and feeble it is the greatest of boons. And with the system of village works and kitchens, and the provision of famine-camps on a larger scale where the need exists, it has been possible to dispense almost entirely with that most unsatisfactory of relief agencies—the famine poorhouse. The heads of distribution throughout the Central Provinces may be of interest:—

	Adult	Child.
Public Works Department ...	571, 4' ...	95,475
Relief works:—		
Village works	4 [illegible]332	
Forest works	1 [illegible]179	
Weaver relief	2 , 79	

	Adult	Children.
Gratuitous relief:—		
Dependents	11,105 ...	114,006
Kitchens	78,109 ...	297,625
Otherwise relieved	9 ,374 ...	16,056
Poorhouses	432 ...	101
Total ...	1,261,349 ...	523,383

By the time these figures are in print, I dare say the total on relief will be a couple of millions, or a sixth of the entire population; but everything is ready, and there will be no flurry or dislocation, and certainly no attempt, by means of increased tasks or reduced wages, to keep the people away. The complete success of the work of relief among the aboriginal tribes must be set down, as so much else must be, to the instructions given last August by the then Chief Commissioner, Mr. Denzil Ibbetson, to whose foresight, promptitude, and grasp the setting-up and smooth starting of all this gigantic organisation are mainly due. If other Governments had approached this particular task with the same knowledge and in the same spirit which dictated the instructions that I here append, tens of thousands of lives would have been saved:—

"Our ordinary methods of relief," wrote Mr. Ibbetson, "fail to reach them, as they will not come to large relief works; they are shy and distrustful, and will, if allowed to do so, starve, or very nearly starve, before they apply for relief. It is necessary, therefore, to relax the usual conditions in their case, and to adopt a special system. It is not enough to render relief available; care must be taken that it is actually given to all who really need it."

And this has been done. As to the larger works which are being run by the Public Works Department there is not much to be added to my previous letter, but on two points I should like to say a word with a general application. "It cannot be too clearly understood," wrote Mr. Ibbetson in one of the August circulars, "that the exaction of a task depends, in a great measure, on the orderly and methodical arrangement of the relief workers." This has been the keynote of the labour policy throughout the Central Provinces, and the organisation has been so thoroughly done that a system of gang-work has been introduced, in which payment up to a certain point is made by results, and there is no minimum. The people are left to form their own gangs, so that members of the same family, and people from

the same village, work side by side; and, for the rest, this system of qualified piece work is strictly confined to the able-bodied. Now the withdrawal of the protection of the minimum wage is obviously a very risky step, and I do not mention the experiment to recommend it. But the fact that the wages earned are, as a rule, on the maximum scale, and that, to the best of my knowledge, they never, taking the week together, fall to anything like the level of the Bombay penal minimum, is a striking testimony to the value of order and method. As to the character of the work, the percentage of strictly useless undertakings—heaps of broken stone that will never be used and roads that will never be travelled on—is, I should say, relatively small, but there is plenty of room for improvement. Let me add, however, that Mr. Monteath's contention that "it has never been considered a matter of primary importance to make famine labour productive," would hardly command respect here; nor is this the only part of India where I have heard officials sigh over the gigantic waste of famine labour. Endless good work—productive, paying, serviceable work—wants doing in every district, and can

never get itself done in normal times for lack of funds. It sounds a paradox, but it is true all the same, that only when poverty reaches famine-pitch can India hope to set to work to improve her own house. Under these circumstances the technical view of famine works as a mere test of destitution, such a test as the stoneyard offers to the able-bodied pauper at home, is both costly and misplaced. The problem is emphatically one of poverty, not of pauperism, and, in my judgment, the less Indian officials draw on the obsolete formulas of the English Poor Law the better. The people of India are the poorest in the world, but they are above all things self-respecting, and the fact that they have no Poor Law, and that the State does nothing for the destitute except in famine time, ought not to be forgotten. If you want to demoralise the people, then by all means set them building vain altars —of broken stones or useless earth—to a fetish of pauperism which has no earthly relation to the facts of Indian life.

I must reserve what I have to say about the land system and revenue procedure—matters that are interlocked with the desperate

condition of the people. But lest it should be assumed that because the relief system is working well the worst of the trouble is over, I am sending you an extract from a letter which comes to me from a native gentleman of influence, who is held in the highest respect by Indians and Englishmen :—

"There is absolutely no money left with the majority of the cultivators to buy seed, buy or hire bullocks to plough their fields, and to pay for the other expenses of cultivation, and to feed themselves and their families between the sowing and the earliest harvest. The Government is distributing 25 lakhs (£166,000) as takavi—loans for agricultural purposes—and the Charity Fund, 18 lakhs. But even this sum, which would under ordinary circumstances have been a very substantial help to the cultivators, is, I am afraid, likely to fall very short of the actual requirements of the people. The reports which I have received, as secretary to the Central Provinces branch of the Famine Charitable Relief Fund, disclose a most serious state of things. Sums which the districts have put down as representing the minimum needs are considerably in excess of what we have been able to give them. For the cultivators are, in most tracts, simply bankrupts, without cattle, without money, and without credit. How they will get on this time, Heaven alone knows. The very success of the measures adopted to keep the people alive has had the effect of blinding people to a perception

of the real condition of our people. No other province in the whole Empire has suffered half as much."

No words of mine can add force to this appeal.

BILASPUR, CENTRAL PROVINCES.

XIX

HOW INDIA IS FED

In spite of the famine, there is grain enough and to spare in India. India has, in fact, contrived to feed herself through the whole famine period, that is to say since August or September, without any appreciable import of foodstuffs; and though the exports of wheat and rice have sunk enormously, they have by no means ceased. This circumstance helps one to realise the extent of the food surplus in a normal year, and at the same time to appreciate the cruelty of the doctrine that over-population is at the bottom of India's misery. The great province of Bengal, the province of Burmah, and the greater part of the North-west Provinces had good or fair harvests last autumn and winter, and they have created the supply on which the other provinces have drawn. The Bengal winter rice crop occupies 31½ million

acres, the total cultivated area of all crops in Bengal being 57 million acres. The winter rice crop is, therefore, the most important crop in Bengal. In December and January last the yield of this crop was about 18 million tons of cleaned rice—a full average yield. The bulk of it is required to feed Bengal; but with an average yield there is a considerable surplus. Suppose this surplus to be a million tons, this means food for six million persons for six months—or, say, enough to feed the whole of the people who came upon relief in the famine districts. The actual surplus, I am told, is possibly more. In the famine year of 1896–7, the Bengal rice crop failed over considerable areas, and yielded only $7\frac{1}{2}$ or 8 million tons. There was therefore a serious shortness in the supply required by the most densely peopled province of India. In both 1895–7 and 1899–1900 Burmah has had great rice crops, and in each year a large surplus has been available for export to India or Europe. The surplus this year has been put as high as two million tons. Most of this goes, as usual, to Europe, but a good deal has found its way to Bombay. In 1896–7 the grain

markets were very short, and the Government was anxious as to the sufficiency of food supplies. This year there has been no anxiety. The thickly populated rice-eating districts were known to be safe, and only the thinly populated western and central tracts were affected.

The reversal of ordinary trade conditions comes out in the reports of rail-borne traffic issued by the famine provinces. Thus in the quarter ending December the Central Provinces imports exceeded the exports by 649,000 maunds, and in place of 203,889 maunds of grain and pulse imported in the corresponding period of 1898, 2,271,644 maunds were imported. Instead of exporting half a million maunds of rice, as it did in 1898, the Provinces imported over a million and three-quarters, two-thirds of which came from Bengal, and the rest from Burmah. "The main feature of the quarter's trade," writes Mr. R. H. Craddock, Chief Secretary to the Government, "is that instead of parting with grain to buy commodities the people have been parting with commodities to buy grain." The export of goods classified as "all other articles of merchandise" rose

from 283,343 to 564,442 maunds. The nature of these goods is, unfortunately, unknown. Turning to the North-west Provinces and Oudh, the drain created by the famine is shown by an increased export of more than four million maunds of wheat and other grains. Rajputana and Central India were the largest customers; the Punjaub, Bombay, and the Central Provinces also imported freely.

How is it that, with a surplus in excess of all requirements, the people of India have had to pay as much as twice the normal price for grain? It is difficult to get the data for answering the question, for the grain-trade of India is numbered amongst the mysteries of this land of mystery. A high authority, in answer to the question whether the market is rigged, replies: "I do not think myself that prices are artificially made or kept up by a ring of grain-dealers, and I think that they are natural prices. One reason for the sudden rise is that the agriculturists throughout India, when drought occurs in any part, become nervous and hang on to their grain, and have to be tempted by high prices. Another is that in the famine-tracts grain has to be brought from long distances,

and carriage adds much to the price. There is such competition and keenness in the grain-trade in India as to prevent the possibility of an organised corner." These opinions, whilst entitled to great respect, do not claim to be more than opinions. What follows is indubitable fact. "Inasmuch as our normal Indian prices are lower than those of Europe or America, no equalising import is possible until a higher level is reached. Consequently, when we have a short harvest, and our producers become anxious to hold up, prices rise rapidly until the importing point is reached. There they stick, or do not pass it. For instance, 1000 tons of wheat were imported from Australia the other day, and similar small imports from time to time occur whenever a sufficient margin temporarily is reached. But no large import is possible, for prices in India would soon fall below the importing point." It would seem, then, as if in times of scarcity the "natural price" is fixed by the price of imports, and that, whether by design or the unconscious concentration of ten thousand scheming minds on the same point, the price of grain can be brought up to import level and there

maintained. Certain it is that from the first suspicion of famine up to the present time a fine animation has characterised the market behind the scenes. Great plots, I am told, were laid in Calcutta in the early autumn, and it is matter of common complaint to this day that the ordinary person cannot get his telegram through for many hours because the wires are blocked with the bunya's grain-messages. Still, there is nothing in this that may not be accounted for without going in search of conspiracies. That prices are too high, and that somebody is making a lot of money, is sufficiently clear. And the Oriental is a clever trader—very, very clever. My informant, however, continues: "It is a mistake to think that the grain-dealers control the grain. I believe the bulk of the stocks of grain in the country at any point of time is in the hands of cultivators. The dealers buy to sell again, and they have to get their supplies out of the cultivator, and they have to offer him prices that will tempt him. Over and over again have cultivators and their landlords lost their market by refusing to sell in a bad year because they thought prices would go higher

still." If this is so, then the ryot with a crop is exploiting the ryot without one, and the trader is really an agent rather than a principal. In other quarters, let me add, the view prevails that what with debts and land alienation, the ryot's power to hold is, generally speaking, by no means what my informant credits him with. The following extracts from a Bombay official paper show clearly enough that merchants are quite capable on occasion of doing their little share in the way of controlling the grain :—

"AHMEDABAD DISTRICT.

"There is a widespread belief among the people that the district contains sufficient grain to last for a couple of years, but the supply is held back by merchants, in the hope of high prices from March to May. There is no doubt that there are certain stocks in the district.

"KAIRA DISTRICT.

"As in Ahmedabad, people believe that large stocks of local produce have been held back in order to secure better prices in future.

"BROACH DISTRICT.

"Last year's harvests were good, and it is reported that the city of Broach contains large stocks of last year's food-grains, and that dealers are unwilling to

part with their stocks, in the hope of getting better prices.

"SURAT DISTRICT.

"Last year's harvests were very fair, and the district is believed to have large stocks of grain in merchants' godowns in the city of Surat. Though merchants are holding back their stocks in hopes of better prices and have slackened imports, prices show a tendency to fall."

It may be my fault, but I have met no one in India who really knew the inner workings of the trade—or who, knowing them, would confide in me.

XX

SOME PREVENTIVE MEASURES

THE causes of famine—apart from the failure of rain—and the possible remedies and palliatives, have been much discussed within recent years. There are the economic relations which affect the staying power of the people and their capacity for production—matters one cannot touch without raising the whole question of Western institutions as planted out in the East; and there are such factors as irrigation, the encouragement of industries, the improvement of agricultural methods, and the like. In this chapter I propose to sum up my impressions as to the latter. If I can add little that is new to a well-worn subject, I may be allowed to say that the views here expressed have been formed after hearing the opinions of some of the most capable, alert, and experienced men in India.

Take first the question of agriculture. The famine, let me say, is in no way due to defects of the ryot *qua* agriculturist. He is short of capital and hampered by debt. But every competent judge admits his wonderful knowledge of the land and the crops, his laborious industry during the seasons of hard field-work, and his eagerness to improve his holding. Agricultural enthusiasts from the West, who come to scoff at his primitive customs, remain to admire and learn as they watch him at his work. At first sight it looks like tempting Providence to scratch the surface of the land with a light plough, and wonderful schemes have been launched before now for bringing all the latest improvements from Ipswich and Grantham to show the poor Indian what his land is capable of. But the machinery rusts while the ryot goes his way. The truth is that the sun and the wind do his deep ploughing for him. In the course of a spell of hot weather the land is seamed with cracks, which the wind fills with surface dust, and the result is that the earth gets broken up and aerated to a sufficient depth. And the ryot, without knowing the reasons, has learned many a

lesson of the same kind. Out of a poor soil the Indian cultivator wins an amazing return for his work.

The ryot, though he clings to what he knows will answer, is willing to take up with new ideas if you can convince him of their value. While the Departments of Agriculture under the provincial Governments have seen the wreck of numerous fantastic schemes for introducing exotic methods and varieties, they have also seen well-considered suggestions for manuring, sugar cultivation, cattle breeding, and the like eagerly taken up and applied broadcast. The ryot can, in fact, be helped in much the same way as the Irish peasant is helped by the Board of Agriculture and its companion co-operative agencies. But those who teach must first learn to understand the ryot, and that is a lesson which must take time. It is better, say the wise men, to go slowly and make sure of the situation than to try to rush the ryot. Let me give an illustration, with an Irish parallel. It is said that in parts of Bombay Presidency the quality of cotton is going off owing to bad cultivation, and the complaints of manufacturers against the ryot

grow more bitter every year. But it happens not to be the ryots' fault at all. The mischief arises in the ginning factories—so, at least, I am told on excellent authority—where slovenly and dirty methods are the order of the day, these factories being in the hands of middlemen. In Ireland we have the same state of things in regard to flax-growing, only rather worse; for the middleman, with his scutching mills, has managed so to disgust the manufacturer and discourage the cultivator that flax-growing has almost died out of the country. I am not prepared to say that the co-operative plan which, I am told, is about to be tried in the scutching mills of Ulster can be, as it were, planked down out of hand in Khandesh. But I do suggest that this line of association, coupled with a strong and friendly lead on the part of the local Government, may well prove fruitful. Dairying is another industry that lends itself to this kind of treatment. Agriculture is *the* Indian industry; and a more hopeful line of attack may well be found in the encouragement of trades connected with agriculture and the natural resources of the country than in the attempt to force a crop of

exotic industries or to prop up those that are dying. In this direction India is undeveloped and only half explored. With her magnificent teak forests and other precious trees, a field exists for all sorts of wood industries. Silk fibres, again, could be produced on a great scale.

Industry in India falls between two stools. The indigenous trades lose their market, as natives are tempted by cheap Western commodities, and, on the other hand, capital and enterprise, for purposes of development, are not attracted as they might be. Experienced Indian gentlemen have estimated that something like 25 per cent. of the population have been displaced from their work by European competition, and either thrown upon the land or forced to emigrate. And that is no trifling matter in a country where famines have to be reckoned with. The tendency is inevitable. But the Government, instead of giving facilities for new industries and for opening up the undeveloped wealth of the country, adopts the dog-in-the-manger policy, and contrives to frighten away the capital which India so greatly needs. It is one thing

to keep a jealous watch on concession-hunters; it is another to make terms of concession so harsh that minerals and forests may be practically unworked.

It is not surprising, then, to find the growth of a school of native opinion in favour of protection. I found this feeling strong in some of the cities. "We don't want European capital," my informants said, "or European direction. Give us a measure of protection to keep us from being swamped while our own industries are developing, and we shall be able to give as good an account of ourselves as the Japanese." For this demand the attitude of the Government is, I think, largely responsible, and, but for the failure of the sugar experiment, that erratic step would probably have whetted the appetite for this sort of diet. As it is, the sugar adventure has done nothing to help the cultivator; it has opened the door to competition from China and elsewhere, and the net result, so far as I can ascertain, is to benefit the Indian sugar refineries, and to make the well-to-do consumer pay an enormous price for his sugar. A strong policy of development would, I think, incidentally turn a good deal of

restless energy now going begging into practical channels.

Turning to irrigation, I fear it must be admitted that it cannot of itself save India from famine; but it can do much to limit the famine area and give security to agriculture. Where you can tap the great snow-fed rivers the system of canal irrigation can bring the cultivators water, even if the rainfall fails; and the hotter the season the better, for the faster the snow will melt. But over the greater part of the affected area river-fed irrigation is, generally speaking, impossible; and even if rivers were within reach, the contour of the country is often too broken and uneven to allow of canal distribution. This, however, is not the last word on the question of canals. It is admitted that an immense amount is to be done by making reservoirs into which a large surface of hill country would drain, and leading off the water by canals over the low-lying lands. Something has been done in this direction, though only a small fraction of what might be done. But the famine is stirring up the Government to take stock of possibilities. Amateur opinions are worthless

on a subject where everything depends on local conditions. But it may be said with confidence that the Irrigation Department, whose mighty programme in the Punjaub and the North-west is drawing—with too much deliberation—to completion, should forthwith put in hand a thorough survey of unirrigated India. With such a survey to work upon, the labour now largely wasted in famine times could be used to reclaim the land from future famine. As to the tank, or artificial lake, of the village, it cannot by itself play any very great part, though it may water the fields below it, and give water to man and beast. It is a charming institution—the Indian village green. The temple stands on its brink, with a flight of steps leading down to the water, and the social life of the village goes on around its margin. One of the highest of religious obligations is its construction and care. But in years like this the tank is dry. With an evaporation of a third of an inch a day, equal to nine feet in the course of a year, the ordinary tank will barely serve for a normal year.

Irrigation by means of wells is, however, capable of enormous extension, and with

enough of such wells vast tracts of famine-stricken country could, except in the event of successive failures of rains, be made to blossom like a garden. The cost will vary according to the nature of the soil and subsoil, the expense of a masonry irrigation well ranging from about £65 in Gujerat to £7 in the Deccan. The unbricked well can be sunk for a pound or two; but in the course of time, if neglected, it falls in. The multiplication of wells is simply a question of money. The ryots are quite alive to their advantage, and the sinking of a well is one of the first objects of a man who can offer security to the money-lender or the Government. But the Government wants its money back too soon, and the subordinate official who hears the application must be bribed, while the money-lender's interest is a matter for consideration. So that where a hundred wells ought to be sucking up the wealth of hidden water, perhaps one only is sunk. To get an idea of well economy, take a simple calculation in irrigation figures. The leathern bag which a pair of bullocks raise, say, once every minute, holds 250 lbs. of water, and in a day the bag will bring up enough

water to irrigate half an acre. This process has to be repeated once in eight days. The limit of irrigation capacity per well is therefore, in the case of ordinary crops, about four acres; in the case of sugar-cane it is about two acres. I am assured, on the best authority, that in the low-lying lands of the famine-swept Deccan well irrigation could be made almost universal. I need only add that astonishing results are obtained by cultivation of this kind. In Gujerat this year the irrigation wells have turned out three crops, and their green oases are the one sign of life in the desert. Let me conclude with the opinion of an expert who knows, perhaps, more of agricultural conditions in Bombay Presidency than any other living man: "I look specially for advancement in the extension of well irrigation. I would dig wells as a special safeguard against famine, whether in respect of food for man or fodder for cattle. I consider well irrigation in this Presidency everywhere a certain indication of affluence or easy circumstances. The working cattle never suffer from fodder-famine. The man who owns well-irrigated land, unless he is a market gardener pure and simple, has

more fodder to dispose of than his cattle can consume. In ordinary years he perhaps produces food crops to a greater extent than fodder crops, but when the rains fail, every square yard that can be irrigated grows generally those grain crops which produce also the largest outturn of fodder." In the last famine in the Deccan my informant tells me that he saw thousands of patches of well irrigation which produced over 2000 lbs. of grain per acre and over five tons per acre of dry fodder.

XXI

DEBT AND EXPROPRIATION

"THE expropriation of the hereditary agriculturist in many parts of the province, through the machinery of unrestricted sale and mortgage, has been regarded for years past as a serious political danger. It is recognised that the danger is accompanied with bad economic results, that it is increasing, and that if not arrested, it will grow to formidable dimensions. It is also recognised that the idea of a free transferable interest in land, which is at the root of the trouble, is of comparatively modern origin, and is contrary both to the existing practice in most Native States, and to the traditions and sentiments—if no longer to the practice—of the people of the Punjaub."—*The Government of India's explanation of the objects and reasons of a Bill to amend the law relating to agricultural Debt in the Punjaub.*

This passage deserves to be quoted in the years to come as the great recantation of the principle which has gone far to shiver the

economic system of India into fragments. I shall say a word on the Punjaub Land Alienation Bill directly. But first of all let us get the ground clear. And as we are touching now on controversial matter—for I am about to suggest that the English system is itself one of the chief causes that make for famine,—it will be well to approach this question with evidence and opinions no less authoritative than that which stands at the head of this article. The immediate and most formidable issue, in the estimation of the Government of India, is the alienation of the ryot's land, which is passing in great masses to the money-lender, leaving the ryot derelict on his own soil. In Bombay, I believe, the transference is on a far larger scale than in the Punjaub. But in Bombay there is no political question—the people are submissive, and far away from the frontier,—and, moreover, as a recent Commission has justly observed, "it is impossible for the Government to know what the land question really is," for the simple reason that in Bombay there is no record of proprietors or of land transfers. In the Central Provinces, where Sir Richard Temple's landlords have been but a

few years in possession, the tenants are already busy alienating their occupancy rights, while the simple village head-men, endowed by Government with the dignity of proprietorship, are being ousted by the money-lender. This universal burden of indebtedness, culminating in the loss of the land, is a recent development, a result of the shock which has heaved up and scattered the old mosaic of Eastern custom. Western ideas of property, individual freedom, land speculation, contract, coupled with Western notions of a fixed and punctual revenue system, have worked the disruption. The facts are not denied. The undoing of the ryot is deplored by the best among the men who govern India, and openly and frankly admitted by the wisest.

The links in the chain which bind the ryot are indeed riveted by the money-lender, but it is we who have put them into the money-lender's hands. Take first the question of revenue. The substitution of a fixed cash payment for a fluctuating payment in kind was one of these links. To get coin the ryot had to go to the coin merchant. And the rigid

revenue system which had crystallised around the cultivator only increased his dependence as time went on. Then, again, the money-lender has had the whole weight of our civil courts at his back; and, finally, the enlargement of credit, which the early British rulers of India gave the ryot when they allowed him to regard his land as marketable, has been nothing but a rope for the people to hang themselves with.

That the ryot has gone into debt, and is every year going deeper in order to pay his land tax, there can be no doubt. Let me give some evidence from a Presidency which is very proud of the moderation of its revenue demands —I mean Bombay. "There can be no question," says the report of the Commission of 1892 into the working of the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act, "that the rigidity of the present system is one of the main causes which lead the ryots of the Deccan into fresh debt." Sir T. Hope, himself a Bombay revenue officer, in the speech with which he introduced the Relief Bill, said that "to our revenue system must in candour be ascribed some share in the indebtedness of the ryot." This view

is formally repudiated as a working counsel in times of famine like the present, but the thing itself goes on. I was perfectly satisfied during my visit to Bombay, that the authorities regarded the money-lender as their mainstay for the payment of revenue. The Commission I have just quoted, which included Mr. Denzil Ibbetson and Mr. Lely, the Commissioner for the Northern Division of Bombay, collected what seems to be conclusive evidence on this point in the villages of the Deccan, and I will give the testimony of some of the villagers in the Poona district. The first money-lender examined said that his clients always had to borrow to pay the first instalment of revenue, the second instalment depending on the crops. The ryots at Dapuri are quoted as follows :—

"The man who owes nothing paid last year's revenue by selling cattle ; the rest, most of them, paid first instalment by selling standing crops to the money-lenders at a low fixed rate, to be delivered after harvest ; when crops are good, they always pay first instalment so, when bad [and five years out of eleven are bad in the Deccan] they borrow on landed security, or sell cattle or implements."

The following table summarises the answers from other villages:—

VILLAGE.	HOW THE REVENUE PAID.
Waiwand ...	Ryots are obliged to borrow to pay revenue.
Pimpalgaon ...	Borrow a little even in good years.
Deulgaon ...	Borrow in some cases.
Kanagaon ...	Crops seldom ripen in time for assessment, so ryots have to borrow.
Nandgaon ...	If rain bad, borrow on security of standing jowar.
Dhond	Borrow on security of standing crops.
Girim	Most borrow on account, or, if no credit, sell standing crops.
Sonwari ...	Have to borrow to pay revenue if cannot pay out of savings, or by sale of cattle.
Wadhana ...	Pay first instalment by borrowing on standing crops. If no crops, mortgage land, or sell.
Morgaon ...	Same.
Deulgaon (2) ...	Same.
Ambi	Same.
Tardoli	Pay first instalment by borrowing on standing crops, or, if no crops, borrow on interest.
Kusigaon ...	Same.
Naroli	Same.

From the Punjaub we get the same testimony; and here again the fact comes out that even a light assessment may, from its want of elasticity, force the ryot into debt. Mr. Wilson, the Financial Commissioner, writes:—

"My recent experience in Gargaon and Jhagjjar of

the ruinous effects of a light fixed assessment, even on a thrifty peasantry, in bad years, has convinced me strongly of the unsuitability of a fixed assessment to such a tract, and to such a people, whom it would be certain sooner or later to force into debt and mortgage."

A recent official inquiry in four Punjaub districts, the results of which I am enabled to lay before you, brings out the precise proportion that debts due to land revenue bear to the total indebtedness of the peasant. Three typical villages are taken in each district, and for each group an analysis is made of the causes of debt, of which I give the principal heads :—

	Villages in District 1. Rs.	Villages in District 2. Rs.	Villages in District 3. Rs.	Villages in District 4. Rs.
Agricultural	67,869	92,269	29,938	70,717
Land revenue	14,207	27,360	11,357	2,504
Social expenses	10,847	13,476	10,520	1,502
Law	5,702	5,706	3,647	6,472
Various unspecified ...	42,078	36,523	32,591	67,635
Interest when shown) ...	44,184	89,219	33,100	49,510

The proportion of debts for land revenue to the whole is about 11 per cent. But land

revenue, being a fixed burden which must twice a year be met, crops or no crops, rain or drought, has more than a quantitative importance. The high official who conducted the inquiry in question describes the part this item plays in the peasant's road to ruin :—

"Ordinarily the small cultivator gets into debt by borrowing grain for food after a short harvest, and failing to repay his debt in the ensuing rabi (spring crop). He begins to take grain in small quantities in, say, November or December, and lives wholly or partially on grain advances until his spring crop is cut. If the yield is insufficient he becomes involved. The creditor takes part of the crop from the threshing floor, and accommodates the debtor by paying his revenue. In that case the peasant, in five cases out of six, is doomed. Till the catastrophe [of expropriation] comes, he is more or less a serf, making over much of each harvest to the creditor, and bound to put up with any debit balance put down against him in the account."

Here we see how famine may come without any failure of the monsoon. Now turn to the other side of the account, with the picture of these twelve villages still before us. How fares it with the villagers? Out of 742 proprietary families, 444 are practically ruined, 112 are seriously involved, but with economy

may still extricate themselves, and 186 are described as prosperous, most of them being thrifty owners, with fair-sized holdings. The bond is paid as follows :—

	Village in Dist. 1. Rs.	Village in Dist. 2. Rs.	Village in Dist. 3. Rs.	Village in Dist. 4. Rs.
Wheat, fodder, trees, and other produce ...	56,522	116,896	19,370	22,732
Cattle sold	10,161	11,998	3,515	1[illegible]6
Land mortgaged and sold	71,723	6[illegible]044	56,6[illegible]6	104,634
Cash	15,518	18,644	25,[illegible]9	63,0[illegible]6
Balance still due ...	26,543	34,6[illegible]8	13,055	2[illegible],33

On both sides of the account the balance is made up of comparatively unimportant items. The grand total debit for the 12 villages is Rs.815,078, or £54,000.

The bond is paid, and the hereditary cultivator becomes a serf, liable to eviction at any moment, and looking for food and clothing to the grace of the financier landlord for whom he labours. "The ryot toils that another may rest, and sows that another may reap." Nor is this all. The very fabric of Indian society and civilisation is left a bleeding mass as the

people are torn from their land; and with the entry of the alien money-lender as landlord, the village community ceases for all practical purposes to exist. On this point the testimony of British officials is conclusive, and, if space permitted, the opinions of Mr. Denzil Ibbetson, of the Viceroy's Council, and of Mr. Douie, Chief Secretary to the Punjaub Government, might be quoted. The part which British law and the civil courts have played in all this wasting tragedy may be written in a word. We have made the money-lender, once the village servant, into the village master; we have turned him from a useful agent into a blood-sucker; and we have stood as Shylock's friend whenever he came into court to enforce his bond. The extent to which the money-lender has obtained possession of the land cannot be precisely gauged, as there are no complete returns. But in the following statistics, which here appear for the first time, the dimensions of the evil are perhaps sufficiently shown. Of the four districts in the Punjaub to which allusion has been made, the first, with an area of 120 square miles, containing a population of 703,000 people, has had 20 per cent. of

its lands alienated to the money-lender; the second, with 349 square miles, and practically the same population, 28 per cent.; the third, with 233 square miles, and a population of 50,000, 17 per cent.; the fourth, with 349 square miles, and 30,000 people, 11 per cent. This was in 1895. For the northern district of Bombay I am enabled to give the alienation statistics for large groups of typical villages, obtained through a similar inquiry. The districts, be it noted, embrace the worst parts of the whole famine area:—

AHMEDABAD.

District.	Number of villages.	Percentage of land alienated to cultivators.
Prantij	14	32·8
Modasa	29	17·7
Sanand	15	17·2
Viramgam	20	24·7
Dhandhurka ...	6	35·4

The other districts bring down the average for Ahmedabad to 19·8.

KAIRA.

Matar	9	14
Thasra	10	10
Nariad	13	14
Borsad	9	10

The other districts bring down the average to 16.

PANCH MAHALS.

District.	Number of selected villages.	Percentage of land alienated to non-agriculturists.
Godhra	5	21
Dohad	4	18
Jhalod	3	7
Khalol	7	22
Halol	5	16

BROACH.

Amod	9	32
Broach	9	22
Wagra	15	33
Ankleshwar	9	28
Hansar	7	45
Jambusar	9	4

SURAT.

The average alienated is 16 per cent.

THANA.

Dahann	4	71
Bassein	4	68
Salsette	4	13
Kalyan	4	46
Shahapur	3	50
Murbad	3	58
Bhwindi	4	38
Mahim	4	74
Wada	4	27

In Bengal, the North-west Provinces, and the Central Provinces, where we set up a system of landlords, the tenants have at least the protection of special legislation for securing them in their holdings, and for regulating their

rents. The cultivator of Bombay and the Punjaub who has come under the money-lender's thumb is denied this protection. He has no security and no rights.

To say that the tendencies I have been describing must in the nature of things make for famine, is perhaps to labour the obvious. They make for famine at every step in the road from independence to serfdom. We are muzzling the mouth of the ox which treads out the corn. The ryot's produce is the money-lender's, and he can no longer put by for famine if he would, nor can he be expected to work with the will and energy of a free man. The fat years are for the bunya, the lean kine for the ryot. Even the unencumbered cultivator no longer stores his grain now that the railway is ready to whisk it off.

But is the money-lender, after all, the man of destiny, who as capitalist and organiser may yet direct the energies of the ryot to a higher plane, and, after the friction of the transition is over, open a new chapter of prosperity? Judged by present facts, the answer is no, and yet again no. The financier landlord's one idea is to sit tight and screw the last

anna out of the land He is a narrow-minded, grasping, short-sighted person, and nothing will induce him to encourage his tenant, or to improve his land by putting capital into it. In fact, he is the merest exploiter, and as a farmer or landowner, this creature that we have fattened in our courts is the purest cheat. It follows therefore that the land, as well as the people, is progressively impoverished under the new order of things. Let me give chapter and verse from the official side. The Bombay Government, in 1877, pronounced the verdict that

"the money-lender who obtains the ownership of the land is usually a stranger; a hard and unsympathetic landlord, grasping all he can secure for himself, and expending no capital whatever upon the land."

The Deccan Commission of 1892 speaks with bitterness of "the transfer of the land in an agricultural country to a body of rack-renting aliens, who do nothing for the improvement of the land." We have the opinion of the Government of India that such a transfer is bad economically, and the Chief Secretary to the Government of the Central Provinces writes as follows, of the money-lender's capacity

for land ownership, in his Settlement Report on the Nagpur district:—

"Great or small, they are absolutely unfitted by their natural instincts to be landlords. Shrewdest of traders, most business-like in the matter of bargains, they are unable to take a broad view of the duties of landlord, or to see that rack-renting will not pay in the long run."

In fact, the money-lender is just the same as he was a quarter of a century ago, when the Deccan Riots Commission pronounced the class to be "probably the least fitted in the world to use the powers of an irresponsible landlord. . . . As a landlord, he follows the instincts of the usurer, making the hardest terms possible with his tenant, who is also his debtor, and often little better than his slave."

Altogether it must be admitted that, with the best of intentions, we have boggled badly. In the name of liberty we have made the individual a bond slave; and we have destroyed the corporate life—that seemingly imperishable thing which the bloody tumults of Mogul and Mahratta left untouched, and which neither famine nor pestilence disturbed. Nor does it mend matters that our intentions were excellent.

The pity of it is that, though the fatal mistake was years ago discovered, the governors of India, instead of facing it, have allowed the cultivator and the village to waste to death, drawing what comfort they can from the thought that some day, somehow, the occidental process is certain to bring its compensations. The significance of the Punjaub Alienation Bill lies in the fact that it seems to mark the determination of the Government to go to the root of the matter, to imply that the whole question of the repatriation of the cultivator is to be raised. The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act, I may say in passing, turned out a palliative, not a cure, because, while it sought to safeguard the peasant against the worst oppression of the money lender, it did not attempt to stop the right to alienate the land. If India is to recover herself, it seems to me that the policy of the immediate future must be directed to repairing, so far as they can be repaired, the mistakes of the past. To gather up the threads of a remedial policy, they are: (1) The restriction of land alienation, which is the salient feature of the Punjaub Bill. Under this proposal the creditor is permitted no more than

a maximum of fifteen years' enjoyment of the mortgaged property, after which it lapses to the debtor. (2) An elastic system of land revenue, fluctuating with seasons and crops, collected at a convenient time, and based on an estimate of what the ryot may reasonably be asked to bear. (3) The introduction of usury laws as indulgent to the debtor as, say, the bill for the protection of English debtors which is now passing through Parliament. (4) The creation of a system of Government credit adequate in point of *personnel* and finances to assist the agricultural classes in the organisation of a reformed credit system. (5) The extension to the money-lenders' victims of some such Tenancy Act as protects the cultivator of the North-west Provinces; with, ultimately, a scheme, on the lines employed by Lord Cromer in the case of the fellaheen, to enable the ryots to buy back their land from the money-lender.

XXII

THE WORKING OF THE LAND REVENUE SYSTEM

At first it rather puzzled me to find that British officials agreed in treating the land tax as in the nature of rent. Could it be said that rent, as we understand it in the West, existed at all in India? And was the tribute which the officers were gathering in during a year of famine, even allowing for the doctrine of averages, recognisable as rent? In due course I found that a controversy on the subject had for many years been drifting along in the leisurely Oriental fashion which marks the intellectual exercises of Britain in India; and Lord Salisbury himself, as Indian Secretary, had joined in the dispute in 1875, declaring himself emphatically, but vainly, against the theory of rent. In order to start fair it will be necessary to look into the question for a

moment, and a little consideration will show that the difference between the two views is no academic refinement, but a matter of vital moment to the people of India. Lord Salisbury puts the point trenchantly in his Minute :—

"To the modern Indian statesman the refined distinctions of the economical school are a solid, living reality, from which he can as little separate his thoughts as from his mother tongue. To us it may seem indifferent whether we call a payment revenue or rent, so we get the money ; but it is not indifferent by what name we call it in his hearing. If we say that it is rent, he will hold the Government in strictness entitled to all that remains after wages and profits have been paid, and he will do what he can to hasten the advent of the day when the State shall no longer be kept by any weak compromises from the enjoyment of its undoubted rights. If we persuade him that it is revenue, he will note the vast disproportion of its incidence compared to that of other taxes, and his efforts will tend to remedy the inequality, and to lay upon other classes and interests a more equitable share of the fiscal burden. I prefer the latter tendency to the former. So far as it is possible to change the Indian fiscal system, it is desirable that the cultivator should pay a small proportion of the whole national charge. It is not in itself a thrifty policy to draw the mass of revenue from the rural districts, where capital is scarce, sparing the towns where it is often redundant, and runs to waste in

luxury. The injury is exaggerated in the case of India, where so much of the revenue is exported without a direct equivalent. As India must be bled, the lancet should be directed to the parts where the blood is congested, or at least sufficient, not to those which are already feeble from the want of it."

It must be added that the rent tendency so colours and pervades the whole revenue system, that fiscal procedure, as we understand it, appears in India completely inverted. Under a system of taxation the demand would be determined by the requirements of Government, the burden being distributed, according to certain fiscal principles, among the various classes of the State. But in India nothing of this sort happens. Government, acting through the local officer, simply draws into its treasury all it can get, or, as Sir Louis Mallet puts it, all it dares to take, and, like the old Irish landlord, lives and spends accordingly. This manner of proceeding, as Lord Salisbury points out, not only fails to secure any equality of burden, or to impose any conscious check upon the Government, but it stamps the whole revenue system as arbitrary, oppressive, and empirical. Look into the matter, and you will find no equality as between

province and province, district and district, or, taking India as a whole, between cultivator and cultivator. Each settlement officer is, to a large extent, his own master, and I doubt if there are a dozen officials who could give an intelligible account of the principles that purport to regulate the actions of the various provincial governments in the matter.

But is the conception of rent—economic rent—anything else than a fiction imported from the West? You have in India a debt-bound, poverty-stricken, custom-ridden peasantry, and on the other hand you have, not a number of landlords bidding for tenants, but a single land suzerain and land disposer—the Government. A system of land nationalisation may not be inconsistent with free play for rent; but in India the land nationalised would seem to be almost absolutely exempted from the play of economic forces. The occupiers on the one side are lacking in mobility, capital, and enterprise; and on the other side monopoly is made absolute by the want of any power of appeal or representation on the part of the people, while the factors of agitation and combination, which in a free country are part of the economic

process, are written down in India, and ruthlessly punished, as conspiracy and sedition. The rent demand is bound, therefore, to be arbitrary in its nature, and the rent formula, as applied to revenue, becomes nothing else than a claim to extract all the tribute that can be got. After a good deal of inquiry in various parts of India, I believe this to be an accurate statement of the process.

In those tracts, however, where we have set up landlords on the English system, it is true that a more plausible-looking vein of rent has been tapped; but the experiment has had some curious results. I found two strongly marked and absolutely divergent tendencies in operation. In one quarter of the landlord districts the Government had been following up its concessionaires, the landlords, with Irish Land Acts for the protection of the tenants, who, it appears, were in danger of being extinguished by rackrenting and eviction; and in another quarter—the Central Provinces—the tenants were having their rents raised by Government itself—again by the agency of a special Tenants Act,—the efforts of the landlords in that direction having failed to come up to expectations.

In neither case was the Government doing what the economist, arguing from official premisses, would expect to find it doing, viz. standing quietly at the neck of the bottle and intercepting half the flow. The outpour was too fast in the one case, and too slow in the other. Shall we be wrong in concluding that here again "rent" is nothing but a payment determined by Government? Certainly that is what the farmers and the landlords of the Central Provinces would tell you. Who ever before heard of a landlord who had his rents raised by Government, in spite of his protests, and often to his bodily danger—for some of these cultivators are lively people, and not disposed to stand any nonsense from the proprietors who have been foisted on them? In fairness to the able officials of this region, it should be stated that, from the standpoint of taxation, the Central Provinces are by no means doing their share. The episode only shows to what strange passes landlordism and the rent theory may bring an able and public-spirited service.

The so-called rent, then, is not the resultant of the free play of economic laws, but is

itself determined, and that in an arbitrary fashion, by the fiscal authority. Let us now look at the revenue machinery in operation, bearing in mind that the taxpaying unit of India is, in the main, the five-acre man —the peasant who, supposing he spent on farm and family every anna he could win, would still be poor. The officer appointed to value the land and fix the assessment has made his shot—I use the expression advisedly—at the average crop, and has determined the demand which is to hold for the next twenty or thirty years; and in theory it is understood that the cultivator is to enjoy not less than half the profits of his farm, besides the privilege of subsisting on its produce. It is further understood that the good years will enable him to pay for the bad ones; this, indeed, is the very essence of the business. In practice, however, both suppositions are almost certain to break down, and, as a matter of fact, do break down, because the ryots cannot possibly lead their lives, and conduct their house-keeping, by actuarial laws, and a single drought upsets the whole basket of theories. What would the English farmer think, asks a

former Secretary of the Revenue Department, of running a farm which sometimes produced twenty bushels an acre, and sometimes nothing? This is the portion of the five-acre man, and no doctrine of averages relieves him from recourse to the money-lender for paying his revenue, and replacing his seed-corn and cattle after the drought. The fact is, that no ingenuity in computing the revenue demand can adjust a fixed burden to a wildly fluctuating income, or enable the peasant to pay his revenue in bad years. The remissions and suspensions, such as they are, are themselves an admission that the estimate is too much of a fair-weather forecast, and, let me add, they mislead the public into an idea that a well-considered machinery of relief is working in the peasants' favour. No one who has seen revenue collected in India during a year of famine can be trusted to write quite calmly on the subject. After the famine of 1876, English officials were fortified by the theory of averages to clear whole villages, and to turn great tracts of the Deccan into forest reserves; and famine, in some parts at any rate, is continually bringing the same bitter experience. Is it any wonder that the Indian

peasant is unconverted to the doctrine under which such things are done? "They told me that the river was passable at such and such a ford," said an old ryot to an official, "and on their word I tried to cross it, but fell into a deep hole and was nearly drowned. They told me, when I struggled back to shore, that the average depth was quite safe. But that would not have kept me from drowning."

At the end of the assessment period the authorities make another shot; and now mark what happens. They find that since their last valuation prices have advanced, new railways have been made, cultivation has been intensified —or might be intensified, under a little pressure; and after the due application of tests of all kinds, geological, botanical, hydrographical, meteorological, arboricultural, etc., it is discovered that land and farmer can bear an extra 30 per cent. or so on the old assessment. A district in Bombay had, just before I visited it, been reassessed at an enhanced rate of 30 per cent., the officer having concluded that not enough allowance had been made for rainfall. Unfortunately in this case the rainfall stopped directly his report was sent in. It is this

progressive pressure which makes so many reformers in India ask for a permanent settlement. Even so impassive an observer as Lord Salisbury remarks: "I think we may fairly discourage any scientific refinements in the work of assessment, which are a natural exercise of the intellect in highly cultivated officers, but which worry the ryot, distribute the burden of the State with needless inequality, and impose a costly machinery upon the State." I spare the reader an exhibit of the statistics of revenue enhancement, which he can find for himself in the reports of the settlement officers. It is enough to note that the latest Blue-book on the condition of India mentions the following increases made by the last assessments:—

District.	Increase.
Meerut	37 per cent., yielding £11,000.
Bahraich	57 per cent., yielding £9000.
Dera Ghazi Khan ...	£7500.
Seoni	52 per cent.
Betul	47 per cent.
Bhandara	47 to 56 per cent.
Nimar	
Balaghat	
Trichinopoli	30 per cent., yielding £2,...
Bombay Presidency total revision settlement ...	30 per cent., yielding £2,35,5...

Right or wrong, this demand will be levied on

a whole generation of farmers. Prices may have been miscalculated, the weather forecast may turn out false, the estimate of the family's needs may fall short of the truth—for the officer has to play the part of Providence in fixing the standard of living for thirty years to come; in a word, the whole bundle of probabilities may altogether fail to square with the facts. I would ask if any Government can safely undertake a responsibility so portentous as this casting of the ryot's horoscope in a country of violent and incalculable weather vicissitudes.

It would be unjust to underrate the diligence and conscientiousness which the settlement officers bring to bear on their duties. It is the system I am criticising, not the men. No labour is spared in applying the standard evenly between cultivator and cultivator in the district under review, and the work of a single assessment absorbs several years of a civilian's career. The very intellectual exercises at which Lord Salisbury scoffs, are often dictated by a high sense of the responsible nature of the task. But what a task it is! Consider the liability to error offered by the single factor of prices. A 25 per cent. increase, we will

suppose, has been fixed, on the strength of a 50 per cent. rise in prices; and it sounds fair enough. But how much of the enhancement does the ryot enjoy? The officer can only guess what proportion of the produce the farmer and his family, his servants and his cattle, consume, and how much goes to the money-lender. The ryot may never see the price of his crop, or the crop itself may consist of some low-priced produce, out of the proceeds of which the dearer foodstuffs must be bought for consumption. In any case the five-acre man's own share of any rise is a very small one. It is clear that a bad guess may vitiate the whole assessment, and compel the farmer to reduce his standard of living, to starve his farm, or to plunge into deeper debt, in order to pay his revenue.

Thus we are left confronting the question whether any argument from policy or expediency can be held to justify a fiscal method, under which Government first fixes the standard of living and cultivation, and then proceeds to drain off all the winnings of the people which rise above the mark that has been fixed,—a process of bleeding, as Lord

Salisbury calls it, which leaves the ryot without staying power when famine comes. It remains to be seen if famine will compel the attention of the Government of India to this question.

At the least, we may hope that attention will be given to that famine-making agent—the fixed demand levied in good and bad years alike. And here the Government has not far to look for a precedent, and perhaps a model. In the system of fluctuating assessments practised in large portions of the Punjaub, we have something more than a suggestion of the lines of an elastic method—a method which adapts the burdens to the crops of every harvest, and which taxes no more of the ryot's land than is actually fruitful. The plan is adopted only in districts which rely for their water upon the varying overflow from the rivers. But if flood-revenue—which is what it comes to—be practicable and successful, some system of rain-revenue is surely within the bounds of achievement. And I think I may give here, without breach of confidence, the opinion of one of the highest officials in the Punjaub Government, that for that province

this is the burning question of the future. The machinery is provided by the minute system of crop records already in operation throughout the Punjaub, and the additional supervision that would have to be exercised would not be excessive. In the State of Jodhpur I found in successful operation a very similar system, based on rainfall and crops—a system which in effect has re-established, but on a cash basis, the old method of fluctuating payments in kind. There is no need to enlarge on the difference between an automatic plan of this kind, and the present grudging and arbitrary machinery of suspension and remission, qualified as it is by individual caprice and the political exigencies of the moment. No doubt a fluctuating revenue will in bad years land the Indian Finance Member in a deficit, for the burden of untoward seasons will, so far as revenue is concerned, be transferred from the people to the Government. But if borrowing is to be done, it had better be done by Government than by the ryot.

As for the scale of taxation —the proportion of the cultivator's taxable capacity which the State may claim to draw—does not

the solution depend on a radical change of attitude? If the foregoing analysis is correct, we have invoked an illusory economic authority for imposing an oppressive tax—illusory because the tenant is unprotected, and the Government is unchecked by economic forces and public opinion. That is a position which, if India is to recover her ground, must be frankly abandoned, and its place must be taken by a theory of taxation which will bear the light. What follows? In the first place, if the taxation be frankly substituted for the rent theory, Government will fall into the position indicated by Lord Salisbury. There will be a new apportionment of burdens, in which I imagine that the wealthy financial and commercial interests, at present scarcely touched, will be made to pay their share, and the claim for a revision of Imperial charges will issue in such a form as to be irresistible. Then the question will be, not how much can be squeezed from the cultivator, as at present, but how far he can be spared. For Government will realise, as it has never done under the obsession of the rent doctrine, that its first duty is to hold the balance fair between the

different classes of Indian society, and that its first interest, its first and last interest in a country where famines are recurrent, is to secure the cultivator in his position, and to secure, so far as it can, the prosperity of agriculture, on which the life of India depends. Change the point of view, and what is taken with an easy heart as rent, will be seen to be a grinding tax on the subsistence of millions of poor and politically helpless people. In the acceptance of this standpoint, and all that it involves of the readjustment of relations between Government and people, between tenants and landlords, between India and the British Treasury, the first step to the solution of the Indian problem would seem to lie.

APPENDIX

OFFICIAL REPORTS ON THE FAMINE

A FIVE-HUNDRED-PAGE report of the famine in British districts has been presented to Parliament. It gives a mass of detail as to famine administration, and shows at once the unprecedented severity of the famine, and the exhausting drain on the resources, both personal and financial, of the Government. It is unfortunate, however, that Parliament will look in vain for information on some of the most material facts. The papers consist for the most part of correspondence and returns that have passed between the local Governments and the Government of India; and they only bring the story of the famine up to the end of the winter. This may have been inevitable, but it is a pity that the mortality statistics carry us no further than February, and the absence of any mention

of the work of the medical service, which for some reason or other seems to be regarded as a trifling affair, is also to be regretted. Again, with regard to fodder, there are reports of large schemes for cutting and transport; but the breaking down of the transport department seems to have escaped attention. These are some of the points which appear on a first glance at the pages of the Blue-book. And for the rest, the form in which the material is dealt with, makes it difficult to get anything like a connected view of what has been happening.

The "General Idea" pervading the Blue-book is twofold—first, that the famine is the most severe that has ever taxed the resources of Government; next, that the conditions of relief should be made more stringent than ever before. How far the one proposition follows from the other, the reader is left to gather for himself from the Government circular of 27th December:—

"The Government perceive with some anxiety that the numbers on relief in British India and Native States are rapidly increasing, and that they already exceed 2½ millions of persons, although relief operations are in most provinces still in a preliminary

stage. If the present rate of progression is long maintained, the crowds on relief will far exceed the record of any previous famine, and will strain not only the finances, but also the administrative resources of the Government. These considerations impel the Governor General in Council to invite the local Governments to seriously consider, with him, whether the principles or practice of famine relief have in any particular, or particulars, been imperceptibly relaxed, and whether the extreme readiness which the people have evinced to throw themselves upon the charity of the State, and to avail themselves of every form of relief, does not require a corresponding strictness on the part of those charged with the duty of administering it."

Here we have what seems to be a suggestion of general pauperisation, unsubstantiated, it may be added, by any evidence of a conclusive character. In fact, the very next words almost supply the refutation of such a charge :—

"The fact is not overlooked that the circumstances of the present drought are in some ways unprecedented. Since famine began to be administered on a methodical system, there has been no instance of a province being twice smitten by extreme drought in so short a space of time as three years, nor is there any previous instance of such widespread mortality of cattle as has this year occurred, carrying with it the ruin of classes superior to those from which the relief workers are ordinarily drawn. And there has

rarely been a drought which unmistakably declared itself so early in the year, or necessitated so early a resort to relief."

However, the conclusion of the matter was, that the conditions of relief were to be stiffened; large works were to be preferred to small, because of the "discipline and incommodities" which they offered, and gratuitous relief was to be cut down to the lowest possible limits. The Blue-book shows how far the gospel of deterrents was carried. Before the issue of this circular the Bombay Government, in some districts, tried a system of piecework without any minimum, with the result that "large numbers of people, who presumably did not begin work till their strength was low, earned less and less, until they got a pittance of two annas (*2d.*), or less, in a week, that many accordingly left the works, and others were deterred from coming to them." This is from the report of Mr. Monteath, the secretary to the Bombay Government; and to clinch the matter he adds that "for some time a large measure of gratuitous relief will be needed to restore to strength people who have fallen into a state of emaciation." In other words, the so-called relief was for many

simply a method of starvation. Matters were only a degree better where a penal minimum was fixed. This course was decided on, so we learn from Mr. Monteath, because there was "reason to believe that the want of sufficient establishment has made it impossible to apply proper tests in Khandesh and Sholapur, and probably also in Broach." The people, in fact, did not work because the work was not laid out for them, and supervision and often tools were wanting. And, as I wrote from Bombay, the penal minimum was adopted in the hope that it would supply a cheap and automatic substitute for a well-considered organisation. The code minimum in the places mentioned, and in other districts, was accordingly cut down 25 per cent., and the result was —What? The Blue-book does not say. And yet it would surely be fair to Parliament, confronted as it is with a terrible breakdown in the machinery for preserving life, to vouchsafe some information as to the effect of the experiment. I can only repeat that, to the best of my belief, this so-called penalty for the contumacious tended, through want of organisation, to become the general standard of relief—a

standard described by the Government of India as "not a safe subsistence standard, in ordinary circumstances, for the masses." On the other hand, the Central Provinces seem to have turned a deaf ear to the suggestions of the Government circular. They continued their small works, and secured a sufficient organisation to keep them running, and enable the people to earn a subsistence wage. True, the summer has found them with two million people on relief out of an affected population of ten millions. But against this may be set the fact—which is surely the true test of the measures adopted—that starvation is practically non-existent, that the death-rate, but for the cholera, is normal, and that when the cholera came they were able to grapple with it. In Bombay the monthly death-rates of the worst districts given had by February increased from the normal of 2·48 in Kaira to 7·90, from 1·86 in Panch Mahals to 12·58, from 2·15 in Khandesh to 5·95, and from 1·81 in Ahmednagar to 4·09. These terrible figures cannot be put down to any one defect. They simply represent the consequences of want of preparation, lack of organisation, and deterrents of the barbed-wire

order. When the cholera came, we know what happened.

The fearful strain on the *personnel* of the famine administration is shown by the following announcement, made in the Legislative Council on the 19th of January: "The Government of India have done all that lay in their power to provide engineer officers and subordinates for the provinces most requiring them, and have also lent the services of a large number of Staff Corps officers as relief superintendents. It is no longer possible for them to give any further assistance in these directions; and the Governor-General in Council is reluctantly obliged to advise the local Governments that they must do the best they can with their present establishments, supplementing them, so far as is practicable, by temporary local engagements." This statement did not put a stop to demands for help, and on the 3rd of February the suggestion was made that resort should be had to "unofficial European agency, obtained through the medium of indigo concerns" in Bengal. More hopeful, perhaps, was the announcement that non-commissioned officers and privates of the

British army were available for famine service —a source of help which was largely drawn upon by the Government of the Central Provinces, with, as I was assured, excellent results. The greatest credit is due to those districts which managed to make up a fair complement of officers, often out of very unpromising material. But when we hear of the deficiency of Government resources, it is as well to remember that in point of qualified men, they were long since exhausted. The lack of men can only increase the misgivings with which a study of the repeated efforts of the Government of India to stiffen the methods of relief will fill the reader. There is some painful reading in the answers of the Government of the Punjaub, and of the authorities responsible for administration in Berar and in Ajmere-Merwara, and the devices for shortening rations and increasing the task which appear to have been universally applied, though nowhere with such stringency as in Bombay, alternate with disclosures of the people's extremity, and the unprecedented scale and stress of the famine. The effect of this on the mind is anything but pleasant. "Yes, your need is

great," the authorities say in effect; "never, indeed, was it greater; but there are really so many of you, that we shall be bound to deal with you on the assumption that you are tricking us, and we must therefore see what is the very barest minimum on which you will try the experiment of keeping body and soul together." Would it not have been better at the outset to admit that the financial strain made adequate help impossible, and frankly to appeal for a grant from the Imperial exchequer? There is neither candour nor kindness in trying to fight a famine on the cheap, under the pretence that the people of India are paupers at heart, and must be treated to a *régime* of Bumbledom. The matter is not one of retrospective interest merely, for the numbers on relief are going up every week,[1] and it is only too certain that, what with the lack of cattle, and the failure of adequate help to replace the people on their farms, there will be another famine next year.

The Blue-book gives us a rough estimate of the suspensions of land revenue entailed by the

[1] They reached their maximum of upwards of 6,300,000 during the second week in August.

famine, but nothing is said about remissions. It is worth noting that in the northern division of Bombay, where the people are literally at the last gasp, the original estimates of suspensions have been cut down by a million and a quarter rupees, on the ground that such estimates were excessive. The Commissioner asked for powers to suspend about half of the land tax; he is only permitted to suspend a third. In the central division, where famine is general and severe, but not so overwhelming, the estimate has been increased by nearly a million. This procedure seems to call for explanation. His Excellency in Council is of opinion that "it is not expedient that people who have resources should be relieved of the punctual payment of their dues." Nobody disputes that; but, on the other hand, there is no machinery for sorting out the resourceless from the rest, and, this being so, the collection of any revenue at all in the worst districts is an intolerable hardship on the people. Some alleviation, no doubt, has been introduced by the lavish distribution of Government advances for well-sinking, and the like. But while the Government of India grants the money, the

local Government, I am assured on testimony which I cannot doubt, does not hesitate on occasion to dip its hand into the fund, scooping out the cultivator's revenue before it lets him have the money. For purposes of comparison, I give the suspensions for Bombay, four districts of the Central Provinces—the only ones given,—and the worst-hit districts of the Punjaub :—

	Land revenue demand. Rs.	Suspension. Rs.
Bombay	39,224,330 ...	7,146,000
Central Provinces (first instalment)	3,845,000 ..	2,520,000
Punjaub—		
Hissar	600,681 . .	520,438
Rohtale	528,174 .	330,725
Gurgaon	614,570 ...	278,488
Gujrat	361,566 . .	258,000

The Secretary for India may be able to explain the disparity between the first set of suspensions and the second and third. It wants explaining.

INDIAN TERMS AND THEIR EQUIVALENTS

Bunya	... ...	Trader and money-lender.
Mamlotdar	... ...	Native district magistrate.
Taluka	... ..	Official district.
Jowar	... ...	A kind of millet.
Zemindar	... ...	Landowner.
Maund	... ...	$82\frac{2}{7}$ lbs.
Rupee	... ...	1*s.* 4*d.*
Lakh	... ...	100,000.
Anna	... ...	A penny.
Pice	... ...	One-fourth of an anna.
Pie	.. ...	One-twelfth of an anna.

THE END

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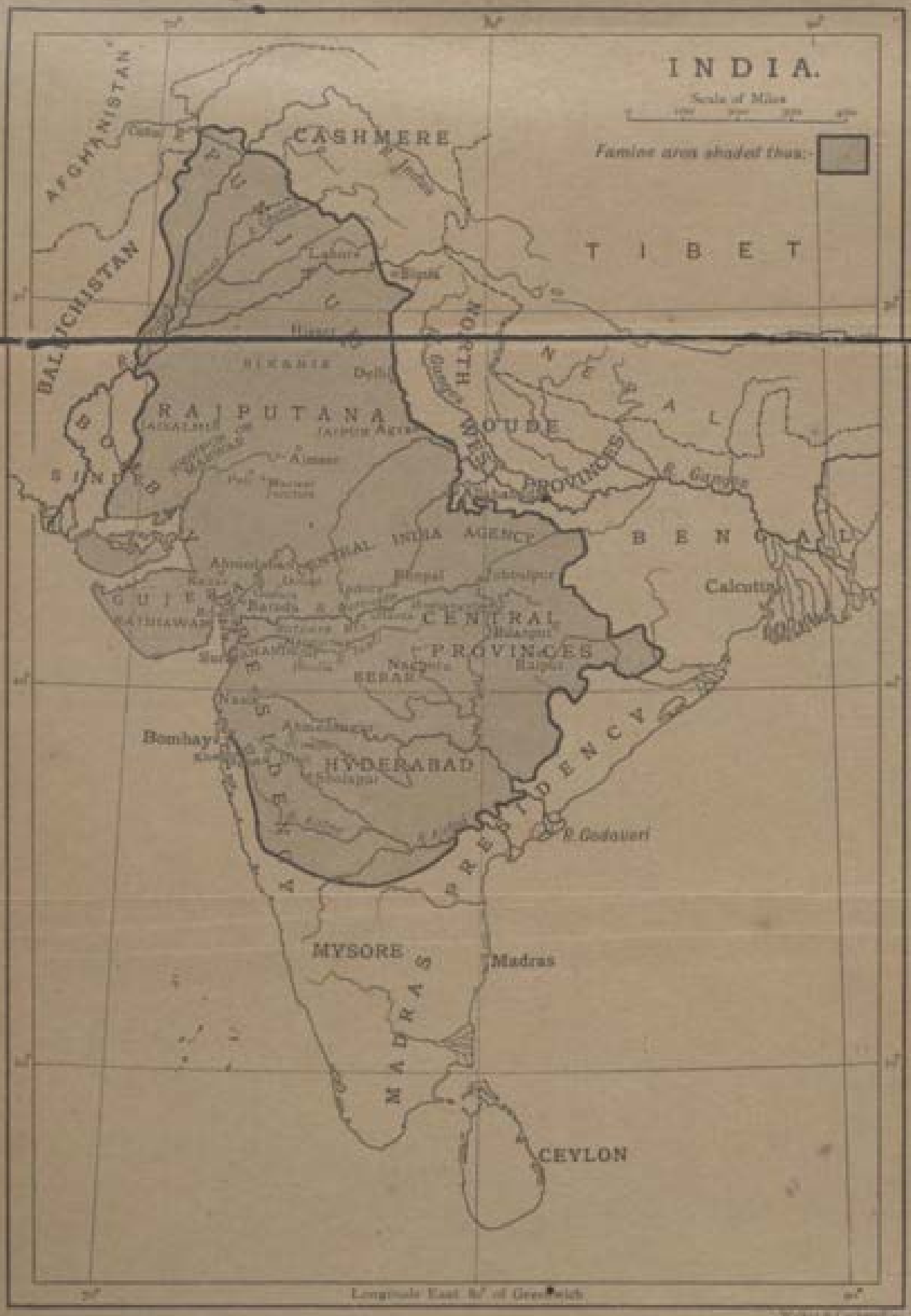

NOTE.—*This map provides a rough indication of the famine area based on the official relief statistics. In view of the universal fodder famine in the Punjaub, the whole Province has been shaded. The actual food famine was confined, in the main, to parts of the unirrigated districts. The places visited will be found on the map.*

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